

Ruth 3:1-8 A Perilous Plan Part 1

What is the biblical plan for finding a potential mate? The Bible presents several ways that people have found their spouses. You could follow **Adam's** example and just wait until the Lord brings you a mate. You could follow **Isaac's** example by having your father send a servant back to his hometown to find a girl who is willing to water his camels. Or you could follow the example of **Ruth**, who lay down near a potential husband and tickled his feet until he woke up. I would not suggest that young women today imitate Ruth's example here, but it worked for Ruth.

The Bible does not give us a particular method of finding a mate, but in the book of Ruth, we find that Naomi comes up with a plan to find a husband for Ruth.

Remember that the theme of the book is how God demonstrates His faithfulness by loving, superintending, and caring for His people. Chapter 3 shows how God is going to provide a home and security for Naomi and Ruth. And he's going to do it through, or perhaps in spite of, Naomi's perilous plan.

We should also note that this passage uses the two words we studied last time—*goel* and *hesed*. Boaz is the *goel*, and he is impressed with the *hesed* that Ruth shows toward Naomi.

Today we'll look at Naomi's perilous plan to provide security for Ruth.

- I. Naomi hatches a plan. .1-4
 - A. .1 The goal of her plan is find “rest” for Ruth.
 1. The word “rest” in this case pertains to a home, a place of security, protection, and peace.
 2. In other words, Naomi was looking for a way that Ruth could get married and enjoy family life.
 3. Naomi, as the MIL, was responsible for Ruth, so she took it upon herself to find a place of permanent security for her. And now that Boaz had shown some interest in Ruth, Naomi begins to hatch a plot to help Boaz see that Ruth would be a suitable mate.
 - B. Why would a marriage be in Ruth's best interests?
 1. Ruth was in a vulnerable position. She was an unattached widow with no viable means of long term support. The gleaning season was over, so there was no more free food for the picking.

2. The prospects for Ruth's future were rather bleak. Without a husband and family, Ruth would spend the rest of her life as a destitute widow. Naomi could endure that for herself, but Ruth was a young woman and should not have to endure the prospect of many decades of destitution, poverty, and loneliness stretching out ahead of her.
3. Marriage would provide Ruth not only with a husband, but with the security of food, shelter, clothing, and companionship for the rest of her life.
4. So Naomi determines to find a husband for Ruth.

App: We all benefit from the intervention of people on our behalf. One of the ways that God provides for us is through the work of others. It's important to develop and maintain good relationships with others. In our time of need, our friends and associates can help us.

We all have ways that we can work for the benefit of others. Maybe you could recommend someone for a job or even play the matchmaker like Naomi did.

All things being equal, happiness, security, and stability stem from marriage. One of the greatest blessings of life is a good marriage, so it's entirely appropriate to seek marriage for yourself and for your loved ones. It is appropriate and right for parents to seek "rest," i.e., a home and family, for their children.

Many in modern culture tell us that marriage is not necessary for a fulfilling and meaningful life. Marriage restricts you and prevents you from enjoying freedom and achievement. Single people have more freedom and more fun than married people do. It's hard to climb the corporate ladder as a wife and mother. Family life holds you back—that's what our culture tells young people today. It's better to be unmarried, uncommitted, and unattached.

But that is a false and unbiblical message. If you find the right mate, marriage is a great blessing. Lack of marriage is part of the problem, not part of the solution to our culture's problems. The blessings of family and home life far exceed whatever money and self-centeredness can provide. I recommend marriage and family as the best source of contentment, stability, and security.

Pr 18:22 Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.

Naomi could not tolerate the idea of a young woman like Ruth remaining as a destitute widow for the rest of her life. She had to find Ruth a suitable mate, and it seemed like a particular man was just the right candidate.

C. Here's the plan:

1. .2 The whole scheme depends on Boaz; he's the target, the suitable mate. He is the near-kinsman who could solve all their problems. Naomi states that Boaz is "of our kindred." That is, he's our relative, a member of our clan.

We should give Naomi credit for that little word—"our." She's including Ruth in the family, even though Ruth is a foreigner who is connected to the family only by marriage to her now-dead husband. Naomi is being very kind and thoughtful in this regard.

2. .2b Boaz will be winnowing barley that evening. Here's an opportunity to see if Boaz will play the role of the *goel*, the kinsman redeemer.

Winnowing was the process of separating the seed (in this case, barley) from the chaff following the threshing process. The material would be tossed vertically into the air with a winnowing fork, allowing the wind to blow away the lighter chaff and the heavier seed to fall to the ground.¹

The threshing floor was not a wooden structure but a place near the fields that would be level and hard. It would typically be located on a hill so that the breeze could come through and blow away the chaff. Farmers often winnowed in the evening because the breeze would be right for that job.

3. Harvest time was also often an occasion for feasting and celebration. Naomi knows that Boaz and his family and friends will be having a meal at some point that evening.
4. .3 Naomi advises Ruth to wash, put on perfume (some kind of perfumed oil), take her warm outer garment ("raiment"—outer garment, cloak), and go to the threshing floor. Remember that this will happen at night, so Ruth is not really dressing to impress or entice Boaz. He probably won't be able to notice how she's dressed.

¹ Scott Estell, *The Book of Ruth*, n.d.

Speaking of dress, it seems possible that until this time, Ruth had been wearing the clothing of a mourning widow. Changing her clothing and using perfumed oil would be a sign that she is finished grieving for her dead husband and is now ready to return to normal life, which would include marriage (cf. 2 Sam 12:20).

Perhaps Boaz had not shown more interest in Ruth because she continued to dress as a widow mourning over the loss of her husband. It was not appropriate for Boaz to show romantic interest in a grieving widow. Boaz had shown some interest in Ruth, but he really could not do more than that because she was still considered to be a widow in mourning.

5. .4 When Boaz lies down, Ruth should go in, uncover his feet, and lie down.

- a) Why would Boaz be sleeping at the threshing floor by the piles of grain? Most likely to prevent robbery or perhaps prevent animals from eating all the grain. Farmers worked hard to gather this grain, and they were not about to let anyone steal it or eat it. This grain was worth a lot of money and represented a lot of labor.
- b) Why would a wealthy, powerful man spend the night in a barn? You'd think that he would have a trusted servant do this job. But the fact that Boaz is out there in the fields with his workers shows that he is just a working man. He may be rich and powerful, but at heart he's just a farmer. He's a regular guy, not some elitist or snob.
- c) What does "uncover his feet" mean? As you might imagine, there's a lot of discussion in the commentaries about this phrase.

Although the phrase "uncover the feet" can be used in other ways, it seems that in this case, it means "uncover his feet," or perhaps "lower limbs." The idea would be that Boaz would eventually become uncomfortable and wake up, and thus find Ruth lying there.

- d) .4end Naomi is certain that Boaz would tell Ruth what to do after that. This whole plan revolved around Boaz's response. Naomi was sure that, when Boaz saw Ruth, he would do the proper, suitable thing. All of this depends on Boaz's good character and wisdom. That's why this is a rather delicate and dangerous plan—how is Boaz going to respond to Ruth and her request? What's going to happen when he wakes up and finds Ruth lying there?
- e) Naomi seems to be confident that Boaz will do the right thing. He's proven himself to be a good and godly man; he's a man of virtue and good reputation. He was not like so many others of that era who did whatever was right in their own eyes. Naomi had confidence in Boaz; he will tell Ruth what to do next; he'd do the right thing.

App: I wonder if people have that same confidence in us. If we were facing a delicate situation, could we be trusted to do the right thing? Do we have a reputation for honesty and integrity? Could you be trusted to behave yourself properly in a situation like this? Some men would have taken advantage of Ruth in that situation, and there's little that Ruth could have done.

How we respond to these kind of delicate and potentially disastrous situations depends on our inner character. Boaz was a man of integrity and honor. Naomi knew that he would not abuse Ruth or do anything improper.

I hope that people have the same confidence in us. When given the opportunity to do the right thing or the wrong thing, we choose the right thing. I trust that people have confidence in us that we are people of honor and virtue. People hopefully don't have any doubts about what we'd do in a precarious situation like this. I trust that we would behave ourselves properly as well.

Illus.: Story about the plumber who found about \$600k in checks and cash behind a wall in a church bathroom—he could have kept all the cash for himself and said nothing about it.

II. Ruth agrees to follow the plan. .5-9

- A. .6 She went down to the threshing floor and did what Naomi told her to do.
- B. .7 Sure enough, when Boaz was finished with the evening meal, he went over to the piles of grain and lay down.
1. Boaz's "heart was merry" because he had just eaten and enjoyed a good time with friends and family. After a hard day of work, and after a big meal and good fellowship, a man would naturally sink into a deep sleep almost anywhere he lay down.
 2. BTW, the text does *not* say that Boaz was drunk. He had enjoyed a good meal, and perhaps he had something to drink; but remember that Boaz is a good and godly man. We should assume that such a man would *not* be getting drunk. He's contented and happy, but not intoxicated. He's probably very tired after a long, eventful day. And feeling good and with a full belly, he lay down and quickly fell asleep.
- C. .7end Ruth came in quietly, uncovered his feet, and lay down. The word "softly" here means "secretly." No one saw her come in and lie down.
- D. .8 Just as Naomi had planned, Boaz woke up at some point and found Ruth lying there. So here is the high point of the story, the moment of truth. How will Boaz respond to this situation? Ruth's future depends on how Boaz responds to her.

Trans: Bible students have long realized that Naomi's plan is a bit of a gamble, to say the least. Who is to say that Boaz would understand what Ruth is asking for? Waking up in the middle of the night to find a foreign female at his feet, Boaz easily could have misunderstood the whole situation. What is Ruth suggesting by meeting him secretly like this? This could have been a huge disaster for Ruth; it could have turned out very badly had Boaz not responded correctly. Had Boaz not been a man of good character and virtue, Ruth might have been in real danger.

Quote: The first scene closes, leaving us to wonder if this delicate and dangerous plan will work.²

² Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 688.

One writer called Naomi's plan "faith-filled but folly-laden."³ It easily could have gone very badly. What's going to happen next?

That's where we'll leave the characters for today. How is Boaz going to respond to Ruth's presence? Will he understand what Ruth is trying to say? We'll have to remain in suspense until next time.

Until next time, let's consider how we could intervene on behalf of someone else. We don't have to develop schemes like this to help others, but we could probably do something. Maybe we could make a recommendation or an introduction for someone. Just a phone call, a text, or an email could have a major impact on someone else's life. So think about whom you could help in some way this coming week.

Let's also consider whether we have the kind of inner, personal character and virtue that allow people to trust us to do the right thing. There should be no doubt in people's minds that we are trustworthy and virtuous people. There should be no question about whether we would respond correctly in a delicate and potentially dangerous situation. We should be people of integrity and virtue that others trust to do the right thing.

³ David Schrock, "One Beautiful, Scandalous Night: How God Brings Redemption through a Foolish Plan, A Faithful Woman, and a Righteous Man (Ruth 3:1–18)," *The Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Spring and Fall 2013 18, no. 2 (2013): 24.