

3. Better Relationships

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Subtitle: Relationship Principles from the Life of Ruth

Our Sunday messages are currently focussed on relationships, and how we can improve our interactions with those around us (family, friends etc.)

Happiness in life doesn't come from having lots of stuff or high accolades for our achievements - it comes from having good, strong & lasting relationships.

Last week we explored Basic Relationship Principles from Proverbs & Ecclesiastes.

Today we will study relationship principles from the life of Ruth.

Ruth 1:1–5 (NLT) *In the days when the judges ruled in Israel, a severe famine came upon the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah left his home and went to live in the country of Moab, taking his wife and two sons with him. 2 The man's name was Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi. Their two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. And when they reached Moab, they settled there. 3 Then Elimelech died, and Naomi was left with her two sons. 4 The two sons married Moabite women. One married a woman named Orpah, and the other a woman named Ruth. But about ten years later, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion died. **This left Naomi alone, without her two sons or her husband.***

- Israel experienced a nation-wide famine during the day of the Judges
- (The Judges ruled between the time of Joshua and Israel's 1st king Saul)
- Because of the famine, Elimelech took his wife Naomi and his two sons to the neighbouring country of Moab (present-day Jordan)
- While in Moab, both his sons married a Moabite woman each
- Their wives' names was Orpah and Ruth
- Over some time, all the men in the family died which left 3 widows:
 - Naomi (mother-in-law)
 - Orpah (daughter-in-law)
 - Ruth (daughter-in-law)
- These women were left without a decent income, without protection and without a secure future

Ruth 1:6–11 (NLT) *Then Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had blessed his people in Judah by giving them good crops again. So Naomi and her daughters-in-law got ready to leave Moab to return to her homeland. 7 With her two daughters-in-law she set out from the place where she had been living, and they took the road that would lead them back to Judah. 8 But on the way, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back to your mothers’ homes. And may the Lord reward you for your kindness to your husbands and to me. 9 May the Lord bless you with the security of another marriage.” Then she kissed them good-bye, and they all broke down and wept. 10 “No,” they said. “We want to go with you to your people.” 11 But Naomi replied, “Why should you go on with me? Can I still give birth to other sons who could grow up to be your husbands?”*

- Naomi decided to return to Israel, and along the way, encouraged her daughters-in-law to return to Moab and find themselves another husband
- Vs. 9 ... *she kissed them good-bye, and they all broke down and wept.*
- Vs. 10 ... *“No,” they said. “We want to go with you to your people.”*

Ruth 1:14–15 (NLT) *And again they wept together, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye. But Ruth clung tightly to Naomi. 15 “Look,” Naomi said to her, “your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same.”*

- Vs. 14 ... *Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye ...*
- ... *But Ruth clung tightly to Naomi ...*
- In other words, Orpah returned to Moab, but Ruth clung to, and stayed with her mother-in-law Naomi
- Then, Ruth made her famous statement as she replied to her mother-in-law

Ruth 1:16–17 (NLT) *But Ruth replied, “Don’t ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. 17 Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!”*

- Vs. 16 ... *Wherever you go, I will go ...*
- ... *wherever you live, I will live ...*
- ... *your people will be my people ...*
- ... *your God will be my God*

- Vs. 17 ... *Wherever you die, I will die ...*
- ... *and there I will be buried ...*
- ***May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!***

This statement is very similar to today's marriage vows, in the sense that it communicates an unqualified commitment to a person, and does not have a backout clause.

Observations from the choices made by both Orpah and Ruth:

- Both were kind women (Ruth 1:8)
- Both loved their mother-in-law very much
- Both "cried" and said "no" when Naomi tried to send them back to Moab
- But in the end, Orpah left her mother-in-law and returned to Moab in the hope of a better future for herself
- But Ruth clung to her elderly mother-in-law and committed to look after her for the remainder of her life

Very clearly:

- Ruth was a covenant woman who lived by strong principles
- Orpah in turn was a woman of convenience who lived by her preferences
- It wasn't in itself wrong for Orpah to leave her mother-in-law
- But Ruth's loyalty to Naomi is highly impressive & very commendable
- She chose to put her own preferences aside and live up to a strong principle of love and loyalty towards her mother-in-law

Interesting points to note:

- After Orpah left to return to her people and to her gods, the Bible doesn't mention her name ever again
- (The Bible doesn't speak against her, but it also doesn't speak for her)
- But Ruth's name is mentioned throughout the book of Ruth
- She ended up marrying Boaz who was a wealthy relative of Naomi's late husband
- Ruth's name is also listed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ as an ancestor of the Lord's Messiah (Matthew 1:5)

What does all of that mean to us today?

- Lets be inspired by Ruth's example of remaining committed in her relationship with Naomi even when it wasn't convenient anymore
- Let's be inspired by Ruth's commitment to the Lord (Naomi's God) instead of returning to the gods of the Moabites
- Lets be covenant people instead of people of convenience in both:
 - our vertical relationship with God
 - as well as in our horizontal relationship with people