

## **Naomi and Ruth: God's Path to Restoration**

[Disclaimer: have a bit of trouble with the use of 'God's Path'. It isn't to suggest that He brings restoration in predictable ways or even that He always uses the same tools. He is beyond predicting. Yet the book of Ruth gives us a reasonable and tender look at the One who allows – and perhaps even *orders* the pain – as well as His hand of restoration. Part of the mystery of suffering is that the very heart and hand that allows the wound also is the only One who can bring the healing. Such is the message of Ruth. And in this story, we witness some of God's healing tools. This is what we want to consider tonight.]

RESTORE: to set in order again; to give back a former condition of health, happiness, wholeness or that which has been lost. To mend, to refurnish completely. To bring back to a former or normal condition by repairing, rebuilding, altering, etc. Reestablish. Synonyms: recreate, renew, revive, redeem, rejoice, refresh. **(Right here we encounter a problem: much loss is irreplaceable, at least in this life.)** To embrace the fact that suffering and loss never truly leaves us the same, is to grant us a certain freedom in our expectations of God. His objective is not to wound and then bring us back to our original state or a higher level of happiness than before. His restoration always views the temporal through an eternal lens. In God's dealings with us, nothing is forcibly lost of eternal value, though much can be irretrievably lost in this earthly life. Part of His objective in faithfully shepherding us through life is to remove, if necessary, one level of blessing to be replaced with a higher blessing, eternal in value. It is the essence of Romans 8:28. His goal is not our happiness, but our GOOD. (He is not against our happiness, but He is not beyond removing it, for a season, for an ultimate higher good.)

Summarize c. 1: a 10 year tailspin which included loss of homeland, loss of husband, loss of sons, loss of hope, future and identity and a major crisis of faith. Humanly speaking, at the end of c.1, all these women have left is one another – and a very uncertain future.

As we read chapters 2&3, try to notice what elements contributed to both Naomi and Ruth's restoration. What did God do; what did others do to help bring healing?

c.2 – Nancy Schneider

c.3 – Gigi Metzger

**WHAT DID YOU NOTICE?** God Himself. People. I would offer these as the two fundamental streams whereby He brings healing and restoration.

***WHAT INDICATIONS DO WE HAVE THAT – DESPITE R&N’S LACK OF AWARENESS – GOD HAD NOT LOST TRACK OF THEM?***

Ruth’s ‘random’ selection of Boaz’ field to glean in. “As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz...” PLACE

Boaz’ timely arrival. “Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem...” TIMING

**God Himself:**

PROVIDENCE: the unceasing activity of the Creator whereby He upholds His creatures in ordered existence, guides and governs all events, circumstances and free acts of angels and men, and directs everything to its appointed goal for His own glory. P. is a function of Divine Sovereignty. God is King over all and does as He wills. (P. and natural order, P. and world history, P. and personal circumstances, P. and human freedom. Regardless of what domain we look at, His sovereign, providential hand reigns and rules. Though she knew it not, God continued behind the scenes of Naomi’s grief filled life, orchestrating her restoration.)

**GOD’S WORD:**

His Word is our objective compass of truth, setting us on ‘true north’. It is our place to ‘be still and to KNOW that He is God’. In it we find the lament of the ages, stories of great loss, the call of confusion and despair from the pit, and enduring hope. We encounter God’s objectives for our souls, conviction, encouragement, equipment given us to engage in successful battle, the very heart of God expressed in the objective page of Scripture. Through His Word, He uniquely nourishes the soul in deepest agony...and it is a mystery. But it is true.

Suggestion: accompany your time in His Word by using a personal journal to ‘track His grace’. This will allow you to see forward movement when you cannot assess it rightly. There is enough grace for today; there is not enough grace today for tomorrow. [There will be tomorrow.]

**People:**

**COMMUNITY OF FAITH:**

Through our family’s deep losses during the summer of 2004, we saw the Body of Christ as we had never seen it before. Teamwork, exceptional care, sacrificial giving and shared grief. There are few things as remarkable or which leave a deeper impression of the character of Christ

before a watching world than the body of Christ in action. While no other human being can heal the wounded soul and spirit, God will inevitably use His own to administer His balm. The statement this love makes to non-believing observers is beyond parallel. (Many of you in this room were involved first hand in this.) God's timing and detailed provision, even in periods of shock and pain, were apparent through the body of Christ, functioning as it ought. **(This is one reason to be actively connected to the body in all seasons – to both give and receive help in times of need.)**

OTHERS:

Bubba: an agnostic, Jewish friend of Bill's from the Y. Bill had spoken to me of Bubba and his intention to have them over for dinner when we got settled in our new home. Instead, I met him at Bill's funeral. He was an agnostic, muscular provision from God on several occasions during times of significant need...and I told him that. (You might imagine what Bubba thought of that.)

The rough-talking, chain smoking crew of workmen who fixed up my battered house – twice – after Bill's death. Yes, I paid them, but their kindness and care went well beyond their paychecks. The mercy and provision of God was evident to us through them.

The book of Ruth provides us with an exception look at the mixture of God's actions and man's involvement, a theme worth noticing throughout Scripture. Let's take a look at Ruth herself.

### **WHAT DID RUTH DO TO BRING ABOUT HEALING AND RESTORATION, BOTH FOR HERSELF AND NAOMI?**

CHARACTER OF RUTH:

- \*Humble
- \*Honest
- \*Respectful
- \*Hardworking - did the hard and necessary thing. Therapeutic.
- \*Sacrificial, selfless
- \*Courageous
- \*Grateful
- \*Obedient: followed Naomi's counsel

ACTION OF RUTH:

\*Forward momentum: didn't just sit or allow herself to be paralyzed, but went to gather food. ***She did something for someone else, in caring for Naomi over her own needs.***

\*Took humble initiative

\*Faced difficulty ('...whenever you **face** trials of many kinds' James 1:2)

\*Waited on God's timing and provision

Look at how this worked in the human triangle:

Through Naomi (and family) to Ruth

Faith, conversion to true God

Family (2x – first to Mahlon, second to Boaz)

Naomi modeled consideration, selflessness and concern for Ruth's welfare

Through Ruth:

Presence/companionship

Devotion and love

Youth, strength

Forward momentum

Provision of food

Faith – she had learned well and now carried Naomi

Through Boaz

Protection

Kindness/thoughtfulness

Empathetic ('the loss of your husband; you left your land and people')

Provision (food, water, grain)

Love

Future joy: marriage and motherhood

**In periods of confusion, trials, suffering and loss, focus on the internal character God wants to produce...and give your hands to the necessary, even difficult tasks ahead. Do not allow paralysis to set in or self-pity to consume you.**

Summarize:

**God's ways**, though unpredictable and mysterious, will allow pain and loss as well as bring restoration. His chief tools involve:

1. His own presence and ministry in our lives, most clearly expressed in His holy, pure, unchanging Word.

2. The God-orchestrated ministry in a host of ways through the body of Christ and even others.

**God's purposes** will address both the development of our internal character before Him and the practical giving of our hand to action. All restoration is dependent on His grace and action on our behalf but will fully engage our hearts, minds, souls and strength.

**Discussion questions**

NEXT 'SIMPLY SOUL': God's Painful Kindness: An Eternal View. (the wrap up of the book of Ruth)