

Naomi's plan

- Ruth 3:1-5
- Last week we saw that Boaz went out of his way to make Ruth feel provided for and protected. He invited her to have lunch with the regular employees. He told his young men to do everything they needed to do to keep her happy and safe. He even instructed them to drop some sheaves of barley in the middle of the rows that Ruth would be coming down so she would go home with a big harvest. And that she did. An ephah of grain, which would have been about half a month's provision, earned in ONE day. And Boaz told Ruth she could work with him all through the barley and the wheat harvests. Ruth took her bundle of grain home, excited about the prospect of having a way to provide for herself and Naomi, but Naomi only heard one thing that night. Ruth said, "The man's name I worked for...is Boaz." That's all Naomi heard. The wheels started turning and Naomi started planning, and now we fast forward a few months, and it is the end of the harvest. And the beginning of Naomi's plan for a different KIND of harvest! That's where we pick up in chapter 3. Let's look at these five verses today with these three main points. Opportunity. Strategy. Humility.
- Opportunity
- Naomi saw an opportunity the first day Ruth met Boaz at the beginning of barley harvest. But she was patient to wait until the season was right until she acted. Now it is the end of wheat harvest and the hard work is over. The timing is right. You see, there are two ways to mess up an opportunity: act too early; or act too late. Had Naomi been impatient, she might have sent Ruth into a plan when the timing was all wrong and the results would have been disastrous. Opportunity is often squelched when we act in haste.
- Opportunity is more often missed because we do not act in time. Or at all. An artist named Nathan Olivera said, "All art is a series of recoveries from the first line. The hardest thing to do is to put down the first line. But you must. The same is true in business. You must act. A lot of business school types analyze things to death and never get around to acting. Perhaps more of them should take drawing courses."
- Using that metaphor, where was the first line drawn in this story of Ruth and Boaz? You have to go back to chapter one and verses 8-9. That's the first time that Naomi said she wanted Ruth and Orpah to find rest, or another husband!, and what was the outcome? What was the next line drawn? Orpah decided that she would return to her father's house. Ruth decided she would not. She decided to go with Naomi to Israel, and to follow the God of Israel, no matter where He led her.
- By the way, can we pause for a moment and talk about that? Ruth decided to follow Naomi. It was a real decision, folks. Ruth was not a puppet on a string and neither are you. There's something powerful in this story that illustrates the relationship between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Ruth and Orpah were given a real choice. Orpah chose to stay. Ruth chose to leave. Now I believe in the sovereignty of God and that He led Ruth to make that decision, but I also believe that Ruth could have quenched the Spirit and stayed in Moab with her sister. You have real freedom of will when it comes to who you marry and where you live and what you do for a living. God will not force His will on you. But, and this is the good news: He leads His people, as a shepherd leads his sheep. Jesus said, "He calls his own sheep by name and he leads them out." "The sheep follow him, for they know his voice." (John 10)
- So, Ruth decided to follow Naomi, and leave Moab. Now she is being asked to follow Naomi and go and essentially propose to Boaz. Why would she do that?
- Steve Jobs was asked once why some people are more creative than others. He said, "Innovation is usually the result of connections of past experiences. For example, I went to Reed College in Portland. At Reed, most of the men took modern dance classes to meet the women in the class. I

didn't realize how much I learned about movement and perception from that class until a few years later when I worked at Atari. I was able to relate how much resolution of movement you need in terms of perceiving things in certain ways for video games."

- Ruth listened to her mother-in-law explain her plan for Ruth to put herself in a position to find "rest" with Boaz, and again she had a choice. She made a decision to obey Naomi. And maybe part of the reason she did was because of past experiences. She had seen the hand of God working in her relationship with Naomi for the past months, and even before that. So though it may look like a crazy thing to do, to go and lie down at a man's feet in a barn after he has gone to sleep, for Ruth it might not have been that difficult. She trusted that God was leading her through Naomi, and that this opportunity that was being presented to her by Naomi was part of God's plan. That's one of the most exciting things for me about knowing the Lord. The longer you know Him and the better, the more you trust that the different turns and twists in the road are just a part of God's plan.
- That was the opportunity. But no one seizes an opportunity without a sound strategy.
- Strategy
- It was a three-part strategy. Wash yourself. Put on some perfume. Put on your cloak. Or some versions say, put on your best clothes. Now, that's not a bad idea for a young lady who is looking for a husband, is it? First, bathe. Second, put on some perfume that smells good and is not overpowering. Third, dress nicely. Dress attractively, not seductively. Women know the difference between the two, don't they? So do men. The word that is used in the ESV, cloak, seems to indicate that Naomi was telling Ruth to dress in a way that concealed her identity. One commentator said that she would have worn something almost like a bride wore on her wedding night, an outer garment that concealed her body and most of her face. That would have protected Ruth from being identified if anyone did see her as she was hanging around the darkness outside the threshing floor, waiting for all the men to finish their meal and go to sleep.
- The next instructions Naomi gave were also part of the strategy. Wait until Boaz is finished eating. Don't interrupt the meal. We all know when many fights occur in the home. Right after the man, or the man and the woman get home from work. He may have had a hard day. Or he may NOT have had a hard day. She may have, too. Either way, I can promise you that when he walks through that door he has one thing on his mind. His stomach. He is hungry and is ready for a nice quiet meal with his family. BUT, his wife may have had a hard day, too. And she has only one thing on her mind: answers. She is poised to ask him a question or two or three as soon as he walks in so she can get him to: fix something that is broken; settle an argument between her and the kids, answer a question about why he didn't do something that morning before he left that he told her he would; or much more. They are legitimate desires. And they need to be addressed. But the better part of wisdom is for everyone to be fed first. Get the blood sugar levels up to where they need to be. Get the stress level down to where it needs to be. Enjoy each other and the meal. Then address the issues of the day that need attention. Timing is important.
- Then, Naomi said, watch where the man lies down. Why is that important? Because the last thing you want to do is to uncover the wrong feet! There will be no explaining that mistake, no matter how hard you try. No matter how dark it is, there will be no way to hide your embarrassment if you approach the wrong man.
- "Go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do." What is going on here? Remember that the story of Ruth is about more than one thing. On the one level, it is the story of redemption. It is a picture of the humble sinner approaching the mercy seat of God, brought by His grace, and being covered and protected by our Savior. On another level, it is a picture of a relationship between a Moabite widow and a Jewish man who was in a position to marry her if he chose to do so. She lies at his feet, perhaps, because she was humble, not presumptuous. She

came to make a request, not a demand. The practical reason for uncovering his feet after Boaz was asleep was that the cool night air would eventually awaken him, and this may have ensured that they would be alone, or at least the only ones awake. What about the instructions of Naomi, "he will tell you what to do?" The next move would be up to Boaz. Naomi was taking a chance that Boaz would not wake up and seeing a young woman lying at his feet take advantage of the situation. It was a calculated chance, though, because she had a good idea of Boaz' character, and so did Ruth. Neither woman expected this to end badly. At the very least, the worst case scenario, would be that Boaz would be flattered but not interested in taking the next step toward marriage.

- The opportunity is there. The strategy has been discussed and is about to be implemented. But not without this last and most essential part.
- Humility
- The grafting in of Ruth into the lineage of Christ all hinged on her response at this moment. She could have said, "What?!" But instead we see Ruth's character again as she replies, "All that you say I will do." That is the motto of the humble. Not the doormat. The humble. It was the response of Christ in eternity past when the Father said, "Someone will have to go down and give up His life for the sons of Adam." Christ replied, "All that you say I will do."
- How about you and me? Ruth is a great example for all of us as we are to respond to our Savior the same way. As a young woman in a foreign land, her response is clear: she knows what she is about to do and is willing to obey her mother-in-law, despite the risks.
- Let's start with that last quality as we apply what God is speaking to us today. Humility. That's the beginning point for any believer. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Humble yourself. That will probably lead to a whole new strategy. The humble will substitute prayer and seeking counsel from the Word for selfish aggression and plotting. Or for worrying and complaining. Then you will be in a place to look up and see what opportunity God has placed before you.