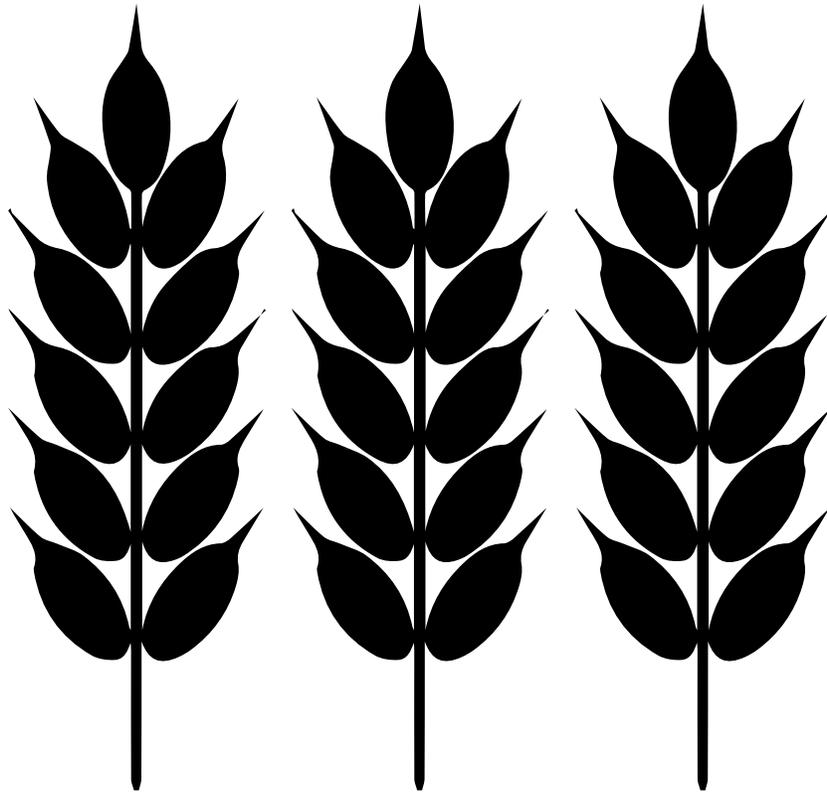


THE WHOLE STORY



RUTH

- Small Group Guide -

Week 3 Article

Bold Faith with Bad Advice

Naomi has her struggles in this story, but one admirable quality shines through in Ruth 3. In this passage we see her boldness as it is attached to her faith. Naomi begins to hope in God's goodness and provision again and devises a plan to boldly pursue God's favor. No matter if her advice was sound or scandalous, there is no doubt that she is racing after God's favor and looking out for Ruth along the way.

Boaz may appear hesitant at this point, and later we find out that he is unsure of whether Ruth would go after an older man like him. More than him being hesitant, Naomi and Ruth, in racing after God's blessing, have also raced ahead of his plan. Naomi's plan pushes the envelope and puts Ruth in a very vulnerable position (we don't recommend this for you single ladies!). Boaz, the righteous and upright man, sneaks Ruth out before anyone knows that she has approached him in the middle of the night. He could have taken advantage of her but instead preserves both his and her integrity by his actions and his restraint.

Naomi knew that Boaz was a godly, honorable, and righteous man, a man who could be trusted. She knew that Ruth would be safe gleaning in his fields (Ruth 2:22), but she took a big risk in assuming that Ruth would be safe climbing into his bed. Naomi had no doubt that Boaz would be God's means of redemption for them and that he would take care of his legal obligations as soon as he could, thereby rescuing them from ruin. Instead of praising Naomi for her harebrained scheme to have Boaz rescue them, Naomi's boldness matches up with some other bold women throughout Scripture.

When Tamar was wrongly neglected by Judah (the great-great-grandfather of David), she pretended to be a prostitute and made herself available to Judah. In that story Judah knows he has done wrong and says that Tamar is "more righteous" than he (see Genesis 38). In Numbers 27 the daughters of Zelophehad approach Moses, boldly asking for a share in their father's inheritance. In response God makes a statute unheard of in ancient times: that daughters could inherit land in Israel! Rahab, Deborah, Esther, and other women in the Old Testament are praised for how they attached boldness to their faith — even when their actions bordered on scandal.

Even though Naomi went through a brief, dark season — she bore (most likely) sickly and fragile sons, lived through a famine, moved far away from her home, suffered the deaths of her sons and her husband, leaving her destitute — she recognized God’s grace and favor and was determined to lay hold of him.

These challenging circumstances and life experiences are what made Naomi such an edgy woman. Naomi feared God. She went through some tough trials, but she never forgot that God was sovereign over her situation, whether rich or poor. The language throughout the book shows that Naomi understood God’s sovereignty over her circumstances, even though they sometimes looked bleak: “The Lord has brought me back empty” and “She had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food” (Ruth 1:21 and 1:6, emphasis added). Later, Naomi saw the hope in Bethlehem, so she went that direction. When she saw a glimmer of hope in Ruth and Boaz, she nudged Ruth in the right direction, too.

Ruth didn’t know the Jewish customs and barely knew the Jewish God. But Naomi knew them both. Following Naomi made Ruth bold as well. Though it’s difficult to understand all the historic and cultural nuances going on in chapter 3, what is clear is that Naomi was bold in her pursuit of God’s favor.

What does this mean for you?

Ruth is pictured as a righteous woman and by all means a woman worthy of praise, but where would she have been without Naomi’s bold faith? When looking at Ruth 3, we can see Titus 2:3-5: “Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.” Naomi, an older, wiser woman is showing Ruth how to fear God and trust him more than anything else. She’s teaching Ruth how to have audacious faith. She’s also teaching Ruth how to have hope in God that leads to taking action in light of his promises. John Piper calls this “strategic righteousness” — being intentionally, purposefully active in obedience. Piper notes that “strategic righteousness takes the initiative and dreams of how to make things right.”

Naomi isn’t pictured as a sage, but her bold faith in God is commendable to all. We all need people like Naomi in our lives — people we can watch and follow in making decisions based on faith. All of us find ourselves in situations where we need someone to show us how to walk with God, what to do, how to pray, and how to believe.

May we not be distracted by the strangeness of Ruth 3 to miss an extremely valuable picture of someone whose boldness of faith was used by God to eventually bring about his promised Messiah.

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