

# NO SHORTAGE OF INTEGRITY

## PART II

### Ruth 3:12-18

*GOD CALLS US TO BE A PART OF THE REDEMPTION PROCESS.  
WE MUST TRUST IN GOD AND ACT WITH INTEGRITY*

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# **NO SHORTAGE OF INTEGRITY (PART II)**

## **RUTH 3:12-18**

Last week, we saw what happens when the paths of people of integrity cross. Incredible loving-kindness flows from every direction. I don't know about you, but I felt both happy and relieved at the end of last week's passage. Naomi and Ruth came up with a risky and dangerous plan. Our heroine, Ruth, put it all on the line. As Ruth hatched the plan, we were anxious for her. As she proposed marriage to Boaz, we held our breath. And when Boaz accepted, we let out a sigh of relief.

All is well, or is it? If you can read with your eye of imagination, this story is as dramatic and has as many twists and turns as a modern day soap opera. We are going to see that there are still obstacles to overcome. Ruth is not quite out of the woods yet.

Here is what we have to keep in mind as we live out our everyday lives, and this is why I have come to admire both Boaz and Ruth so much. When things get difficult, they don't take shortcuts, they don't get manipulative, and they don't complain. They move forward with resolve and integrity.

And maybe that's why we have trouble understanding how powerful this book is. We

are always looking for shortcuts and for ways to avoid even the simplest of responsibilities.

Let me give you an example. During my pre-marital counseling sessions, we devote one or two sessions trying to get an understanding of who will fill certain roles. For example, who will be responsible for the cars, who will cook, who will cut the grass, etc?

I usually start out with a simple task, like making coffee. I had a couple who got in a heated argument over who would make the coffee in the morning. In fact they almost called off the wedding.

The girl said, “You should make the coffee in the morning because you like to get up early. Then we won’t have to wait so long to get our coffee.”

The guy said, “You are supposed to be in charge of the cooking. You should do it, because it’s your job. I can wait for the coffee.”

Knowing that we were in church, the wife decided to bring the Bible into this argument. That’s what religious people do.

She said, “You should do it because it’s clearly written in the Bible that the man should make the coffee.”

Now I’m starting to get interested in the discussion. The husband replied, “I can’t believe that. Show me.” She said; turn to the book in the Bible that comes right before James. What is that book?”

The husband said, “He-brews,” the wife said, “Exactly.”

We live in a culture that looks for quick fixes and shortcuts. But today we are going to see how men and women of integrity comport themselves

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There is big story going on throughout all of human history and our individual stories are part of that big story. God has been busy throughout all of human history redeeming the human race. Not only have we as believers been redeemed by the

blood of Jesus, we are now part of God's redemptive plan for others. Here is the main idea of this morning's text. **GOD CALLS US TO BE A PART OF THE REDEMPTION PROCESS. WE MUST TRUST IN GOD AND ACT WITH INTEGRITY.** In the book of Ruth we can see that God redeemed Israel . After a time of famine, God once again visited Israel and restored their fortunes. Boaz personally benefited from God's redemption. In turn, Boaz would be part of God's plan to redeem Ruth and Ruth would in turn be part of God's plan to redeem Naomi. Further, throwing it all back to the big story, God would use Ruth and Boaz in His grand redemption project by having them become the ancestors of King David and ultimately Jesus, the Messiah. I think we must constantly remind ourselves that we are an ongoing part of God's redemptive plan. That is both a great privilege and an awesome responsibility.

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## **I. THE INTEGRITY OF REDEMPTION**

*Being Part of God's Redemptive Plan Requires That We Act Humbly and Honestly.*

In verses 12-13 we are introduced to the integrity of redemption. In other words **BEING PART OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN REQUIRES THAT WE ACT HUMBLY AND HONESTLY.** In the United States , we are generally a pragmatic people. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it works, use it. If it's inefficient, get rid of it. In business, we have substituted, "Is it legal?" for "Is it moral?" As a society, we have lost a sense of right and wrong. But in God's Kingdom, the ways and means are just as important as the ends. In other words, God will take care of the results; we are to act with integrity.

### **A. HUMBLE SELF-ASSESSMENT (12)**

Acting with integrity starts with having an honest and humble self-assessment as described in verse 12. I can honestly say that in all my years in ministry, I have seen the most damage done by Christians who thought of themselves as more holy or intelligent than they really were. I have seen people hurt and bad decisions made because people thought their way of doing things was more righteous and more logical

that others.

Even though this is unnerving, Boaz is a clear thinker and an honest man. I want you to feel the emotional roller coaster we are on. Last week we sat at the end of our chairs while Ruth pulled off this risky plan, and in the end, Boaz agreed to marry her. I was happy and I was ecstatic. But now look at verse 12. Boaz says, “There’s just one little problem. There is one guy that stands between you and me. There is this guy who is a closer relative to you. By law, he has the first chance to marry you.” O.K. now I’m crazy. I thought this was a done deal. Ruth and Boaz are in love. They’re about to get married, and now Boaz throws a monkey wrench into the deal? What’s going on? Just go get married. Forget about this other guy. I can find all sorts of rationalizations why they should just plain elope. And by the way, where has this guy been during the whole time Ruth and Naomi needed food? And let me just get a little religious here. It was God’s providence that brought Ruth and Boaz together. They were predestined to be together. I’m good at finding all sorts of justifications.

But thank God both Ruth and Boaz are people of integrity. Boaz takes a look at himself with both honesty and humility. He is in love with Ruth. From his perspective, she is young and out of his league. He would love to marry her but he recognizes that according to law, if Ruth is asking to be redeemed in the legal sense by a kinsman-redeemer, there is another relative that is one step closer. Boaz is concerned about Ruth’s reputation. He is concerned about the integrity of God’s laws, and he is concerned about maintaining his own integrity. Boaz knows exactly where he stands.

In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul commands us to do an honest and humble assessment of our faith, our talents, our abilities, and our resources. We should exercise our gifts humbly and honestly. It is really oppressive to be around people who think they are more righteous or intelligent than they really are. If we are going to be people of integrity, then we must constantly do humble self-assessment. This is doubly important for leaders.

## **B. HUMBLE SHARING OF MINISTRY (13a)**

Next, the first half of verse 13 describes the humble sharing of ministry. Boaz wants to protect Ruth so he invites her to stay there for the night. They talk over the plan, and

Boaz says that he will allow this relative to have the first chance at redemption. Again let me point this out. Boaz is more concerned with the redemption of Ruth and Naomi than he is with his own happiness. That's a real change from the way we operate. If this other relative redeems Ruth and Naomi and marries Ruth, then Ruth and Naomi will be fine. Boaz will be the only one that has lost out.

I have a lot of friends who are worried that Willow Creek Church is building a lot of satellite churches in the city and suburbs. My feeling is this. I would love to see Willow Creek buy a whole block in this neighborhood. I'd love them to win this whole Roger's Park area for Christ. I'm not doing a very good job. In fact, I'm doing a poor job. I am concerned that people find Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

We must keep in mind that Jesus is the head of the church and that the church is not a human institution. The church is the cumulative body of Jesus consisting of all true believers. We must humbly share ministry with all other believers. We should always try and find our niche.

### **C. HUMBLE EXPRESSION OF SELF-DESIRE (13b)**

The second half of verse 13 is a good lesson for us in learning to humbly express our self-desires. We have come to think that if we have to ask people for something, then they really don't love us. For example, if I have to ask my wife to cook my favorite meal, then it somehow loses the magic of love. If a wife has to ask her husband to buy her flowers, then it's not as romantic. Let me just address that notion. Baloney! Let me say it again, BALONEY!! We need to learn to take responsibility for our own feelings and desires. If you want flowers, ask for flowers. If you want a particular type of meal, ask for it. Boaz knows how to state what he wants. He says, "Look, if this guy wants to redeem you that would be good for both you and your mother-in-law. But my hope is that he doesn't because as surely as Jehovah lives, I want to marry you, and I will marry you. Again, Boaz keeps her safe by letting her stay until morning.

I hope you caught the one main theme in this section. If we want to act with integrity, we must be humble. Humility will allow us to honestly evaluate the situation. Humility

will allow us to honestly evaluate who we are and where we are. Humility will allow us to take ownership for our wants and desires. The Bible is very clear on God's attitude towards this. It says over and over that God will be on the side of the humble and lift them up. He will take a stand against the proud and bring them down. A lot of reason for misery in our lives is a lack of humility. We are taught to be proud and arrogant from a very early age. I would even say that cultures that on the surface appear to teach humility, really teach pride from a more seductive way. But for authentic Christians, **BEING PART OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN REQUIRES THAT WE ACT HUMBLY AND HONESTLY.**

Let's just recap where we are. Ruth pulled off this daring plan to propose marriage and redemption to Boaz. Boaz accepted and in fact is totally overwhelmed with the idea. However, there is an obstacle in their way. There is someone who has the first right of redemption and marriage. It seems as if they talked about this all night long. I'm sure the night passed quickly. Being of noble characters, both Ruth and Boaz agreed that things had to be done correctly. Redemption is a noble thing. If we are people of integrity, we will be constantly involved in God's redemptive plan.

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## **II. THE INTEGRITY OF REPUTATION**

*Being Part Of God's Redemptive Plan Requires That We Protect One Another's Dignity And Empower One Another For Ministry.*

The next step is one that is extremely important. As we help people we must be careful to protect one another's dignity. Verses 14-15 describe the integrity in protecting one another's reputations. In other words, **BEING PART OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN REQUIRES THAT WE PROTECT ONE ANOTHER'S DIGNITY AND EMPOWER ONE ANOTHER FOR MINISTRY.** The point I am trying to make here is this. As we minister to one another, or as we present the gospel to unbelievers, we must never leave them with the idea that we are better than they are, more spiritual than they are, or more competent than they are. In fact, we should almost be unnoticed. The feeling we should leave them with is that God has provided them salvation, deliverance, wholeness, and freedom. If we are effectively ministering, the people we minister to will only see God.

## **A. PROTECTING ONE ANOTHER'S DIGNITY (14)**

In verse 14 Boaz is very careful to make Ruth feel as if she is a full partner and he goes out of his way to protect her reputation and her dignity. Ruth proposed the plan and Boaz accepted. Boaz included Ruth in the decision making process by informing her of all the legal requirements. He wants to make sure her reputation is not tainted in any way so he doesn't want anyone to see her leaving the barn. Bethlehem was a small town. Gossip would fly freely and quickly. He instructs her to leave before anyone could see her leave.

I want us to remember this any time we want to do any kind of ministry. We should not come off as the expert. We should not come off as the savior. If we are going to help someone, we should partner with him or her. Remember, ministry is not about us or what credit we get. Ministry is all about the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

## **B. PROVIDING FOR ONE ANOTHER'S MINISTRY (15)**

Secondly, verse 15 reminds us that when we help someone, we are to be providing for one another's ministry. As I read through this, I'm sure that God has a great sense of humor. Picture this. It's about 4 in the morning. Boaz has Ruth open up her good shawl. He pours a bunch of grain into it and she ties it up. She slings it over her shoulder and starts walking back to town. She is in her best clothes, hair done, nails done, high heels, carrying this big sack of grain on her back. Every time we see Ruth, she's carrying a sack of grain back to town. It is comical.

But what is really happening is that Boaz has provided her with tools for ministry. He has given Ruth the means to go back and minister to Naomi. Here is what I want us to understand. Naomi received the barley from Ruth. Ruth received the barley from Boaz. Boaz received the barley from God. Therefore, Naomi received the barley from God. Ruth and Boaz were merely the middlemen.

I know I have talked about this before but I think we church people need to hear this over and over. We often get the idea that we are do-gooders when we give money or help someone. After all, we didn't have to give or help.

However, the reality is that nothing we have is our own. Our money is not our own.

Our property is not our own. Our time is not our own. Our gifts and talents are not our own. In fact, our lives are not our own. It all belongs to God. If I minister to you in any way, it came to you from God, not from me. If we give money to the poor, it didn't come from us. It was God's money. I want to emphasize this one more time. We are here for the purpose of furthering God's kingdom on earth. And as we help others, our intent is to help them further the kingdom of God .

In one sense, Ruth ministered to Naomi. Boaz ministered to Naomi. Naomi ministered to Ruth. Boaz ministered to Ruth. And in fact, God ministered to all. I think oftentimes people view church as a place they come to get their needs met. That is the wrong idea of church. Church is a place where we are trained and equipped to further the kingdom of God on earth. When we come here on Sundays we should be looking for new ways to prepare one another to minister to others. Church is a training ground, not a counseling center. For us as believers, we must remember this.

**BEING PART OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN REQUIRES THAT WE PROTECT ONE ANOTHER'S DIGNITY AND EMPOWER ONE ANOTHER FOR MINISTRY.** The goal of our lives is to further the kingdom of God by being part of God's redemptive plan and by empowering one another for ministry.

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### **III. THE INTEGRITY OF RESTING**

*Being Part Of God's Redemptive Plan Requires Us To Trust In His Plan And In His Timing.*

In one sense that was the easy part. Verses 16-18 describe the really hard part, the integrity of resting. **BEING PART OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN REQUIRES US TO TRUST IN HIS PLAN AND IN HIS TIMING.** Personally, I find waiting on God's timing to be one of the hardest things for me to do. Here is what I typically do. I have a problem or something I'm worried about. I realize that I should take it to the Lord in prayer and then forget about it. So I pray about it and give it to the Lord. After a month, no, maybe a week, no, maybe a day or two, I say, "God, You've had the problem long enough and You haven't done anything." Then I take the problem back and try to solve it by trying to manipulate

people or circumstances around me. I'm just not patient to wait on God's timing. I want immediate results and I want to be doing something.

As usual, my approach to life is wrong. It is not in step with how God operates. Did you ever think about why the Sabbath concept in the Bible is so important? I'd be happy to discuss this with anyone in depth. But let me just state why I think the principle is so important. Practicing Sabbath demonstrates that we trust God to care for us. We are to rest on the Sabbath and trust that God will make up for what we could not accomplish in 6 days. In the wilderness, God sent the Hebrews a double portion of Manna on Friday so they would not have to gather on Saturday.

We as modern day Christians don't take Sabbath very seriously. Let me just speak for myself. I don't take Sabbath very seriously and I'm sure that's a sin. And perhaps that's why I'm not very good at waiting on God's timing. But if we want to be men and women of integrity, we must learn to trust in God's plan and we must learn to wait on His timing. Then we will be in a position to receive God's blessings and we will be in a position to pass them on.

#### **A. ANTICIPATION OF GOD'S PROVISION (16a)**

The first half of verse 16 illustrates the anticipation of God's blessings. I don't think Ruth and Boaz got much sleep. They talked all night. But I think the night was even longer for Naomi. Naomi was at home all night. I'm sure she was worried and praying. I think that the people who are left behind on a mission are the ones who worry the most. For example, when in the military, I was busy with the duties of everyday life. But my mother, father, aunt, uncle, and wife were the ones worried for me. The reason they worry is because they don't know what's going on. Ruth was busy executing the plan. Everything was going great. Only Naomi had no way of knowing that. Like all good parents, she was probably flooded with all sorts of negative thoughts. She paced the floor, "What if Ruth was raped? What if Boaz rejected her? What if she was hurt on the way home? Where is she? It's 5 in the morning." I'm sure like all of us who have been parents; she went from worrying to praying to worrying to praying, to looking out the window, then praying and worrying some more.

Finally, she sees Ruth coming up the path to the house. Naomi throws open the door, drags Ruth in, sits her down, and says, “How did it go my daughter?” Notice that Naomi and Boaz address Ruth as daughter. Ruth is dead tired. She didn’t sleep all night. She had to carry home another load of grain on her back, and her feet are killing her. But Naomi, like all mothers, wants to hear everything. And she doesn’t want Ruth to leave out a single detail.

I know that it’s hard for us to wait on God’s timing. We think we know what’s best for us and for those around us. However, we must learn to wait on God and anticipate that He will do great things.

## **B. TESTIMONY OF GOD’S FAITHFULNESS (16b-17)**

In the second half of verse 16 and 17 Ruth gives a great testimony of God’s faithfulness. I think we need to pay special attention to these words because these are the last words spoken by Ruth in the entire book. And what’s even more interesting, she is quoting Boaz. Ruth told Naomi everything that happened. “And to top it all off,” she said, “He sent me home with some more barley. I thought this was a little crazy and over the top since I am in my good clothes, but Boaz said, ‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’”

Naomi came back to Bethlehem saying, “Jehovah has afflicted me and brought me back empty. El Shaddai, God Almighty is against me.” This is God speaking to Naomi through Boaz through Ruth. God had provided Naomi with Boaz and Ruth all along. But because she could only see the world through her worldly eyes and her own disappointment of life, she missed it all along. Jehovah had provided for her all along. El Shaddai had cared for her consistently. But in Moab , she could not recognize it.

Many of us continue to miss God’s blessings because we refuse to give up sinful thinking and sinful behavior. Many of us miss God’s blessings because we are focused on worldly thoughts and desires. Many of us continue to miss God’s blessings because we are stuck in our own pain and can’t manage to think outside of it. Many of us can’t see God’s blessings because we continue to do things we think are noble but God never asks us to do.

God is faithful. God has promised to work all things for good to people who love Him and follow His plan. The road may be difficult, unknown, and frightening like it was for Ruth. Yet whatever we find ourselves going through, we must look for God's hands all over the situation. He is here to be found. As Ruth shares this incredible story, Naomi's eyes widen. And as the reality of God's faithfulness sinks in, Naomi gets more hope. And the more hope she gets, the godlier she starts to think. She will give Ruth some very godly advice in the next verse.

However, before we get to that, I want us to think about what sharing stories of God faithfulness do. When we share stories about what God is doing in our lives with non-Christians, we call that witnessing. The purpose of our stories is to bring unbelievers to faith in Jesus Christ. When we tell these same stories to other believers, we call them testimonies. The purpose of testimonies is to bring encouragement, hope, and excitement to the lives of other believers. That is something we need to do more of. I would like to dedicate one whole Worship Service to testimonies of God's faithfulness. We have seen many miracles at our church but we never publicly talk about them or thank God for them. If you have some powerful stories, please tell me. I would like to gather some together.

Now to the godly advice Naomi gives Ruth. In verse 18 she talks to Ruth about trusting in God's timing. I hate to hear this word, but look at the first word out of Naomi's mouth after this great testimony, "Wait." She says, "Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens." How easy would that be for Ruth? Her life, her happiness, her destiny hangs in the balance ... and she has absolutely no say in how it all plays out. She may lose the man she loves. She may lose her chance at happiness. Naomi may be left out in the cold. Yet Naomi tells Ruth to wait.

It would be in my nature to get on the phone and getting in touch with all my contacts. I would be trying to wheel and deal, to control and manipulate the situation. I would be trying to pull every string I could. But God says, "Wait, Rest, Chill, learn to honor Sabbath."

### **C. TRUSTING IN GOD'S TIMING (18)**

Why? Look at the last sentence in verse 18. Because God will not rest until the

matter is settled. I know this sentence refers to Boaz, but as we have said all along, God's providence is at work through all the human actions. The Bible says that God does not sleep nor does He slumber. He watches over us day and night. We can rest because God works on our behalf.

Naomi knows that her redemption is at stake. Boaz can restore her land and her fortunes. Naomi knows that Ruth's future is in the hands of their kinsman-redeemer, Boaz. Naomi and Ruth know that Boaz is a man of integrity and Naomi comforts Ruth with the words, "The man will not rest until the matter is settled, today."

God plus Boaz gives the women a great chance to be redeemed. Jesus is our ticket to redemption. I know that many of us are in need of redemption. In fact all of us are in need of redemption. We have been beaten up in this sinful world. We have looked for care and comfort in this world. People have betrayed us. We have experienced all sorts of pain and loss. We have sinned and made a mess of our lives. We continue to make bad decisions based on worldly advice and desires. We are in need of a redeemer; One Who can set us free from sin, and make us spiritually, physically, and emotionally whole. We need a redeemer to set us free. That redeemer is Jesus. There is no other way to become whole. For unbelievers, the only way to find peace, joy, contentment, and freedom in life is to give your life to Christ.

For believers, the only way to find the abundant life that Jesus promises His children is to quit looking to the world and start to trust and rest in Jesus. There is no other way. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus is faithful and has proved His love for us through His suffering and death on the cross. He has proved that we can trust in His plan and wait on His timing by rising from the dead. As we learn to wait on and trust in God remember. He is not always early, but He's never late. As we learn to trust in God's plan and as we wait on His timing, we should always anticipate His love. We can gain confidence in His love and we can be strengthened in our faith as we share stories of His faithfulness. **BEING PART OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN REQUIRES US TO TRUST IN HIS PLAN AND IN HIS TIMING.**

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## IV. EPILOGUE

As we study through the book of Ruth, I hope you can learn to read it as if we were watching this on television week to week. It has many cliffhanger situations in which we have to come back next week to see. We could see Elimelech and his family leave Bethlehem during the famine rich. Perhaps he sold his land and went to Moab to settle down. At the end of the episode, he dies, his sons die, and their three widows are standing around in the field.

In the second scene, Naomi talks one daughter-in-law to go home but the other refuses and they make it back to Bethlehem safely. The episode ends with a homecoming welcome from friends, but Naomi's last words are, "God is against me."

The next week starts with Ruth going into the field, and it just so happens that it is the field of Boaz. The episode ends with Ruth bringing home a load of grain.

The next week Naomi and Ruth concoct a plan for marriage. Boaz accepts. But the episode ends with Boaz saying there is another man in the picture. The last scene has Ruth and Naomi waiting at home to see what will happen.

And you too. Come back next week, the same time, the same station to find out how this all plays out.

But here is the point of what's going on. Three people's paths in life have crossed. They are men and women of integrity. They demonstrate what real friendship and godliness is all about. **GOD CALLS US TO BE A PART OF THE REDEMPTION PROCESS. WE MUST TRUST IN GOD AND ACT WITH INTEGRITY.**

I don't know who composed this but one of my friends sent this to me via email. It talks about real friendship based on integrity. It says:

*"A superficial friend, when visiting, acts like a guest. A real friend opens your refrigerator and helps himself.*

*A superficial friend has never seen you cry. A real friend has shouldered soggy from your tears.*

*A superficial friend brings a bottle of wine to your party. A real friend comes early to help you cook and stays late to help you clean.*

*A superficial friend hates it when you call after he has gone to bed. A real friend asks you why you took so long to call.*

*A superficial friend seeks to talk with you about your problems. A real friend seeks to help you with your problems.*

*A superficial friend wonders about your romantic history. A real friend could blackmail you with it.*

*A superficial friend thinks the friendship is over when you have an argument. A real friend calls you after you had a fight.”*

If we are going to be men and women that God can use in His redemptive work, then we must be men and women of integrity who are willing to be real friends to one another. I want to add to this list, “A superficial friend tells you what you want to hear. A real friend speaks the truth in love.