

Caring for One Another

Ruth 4:1-10

SS Lesson for 08/28/2011

Devotional Scripture: Phil 2:19-22

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The concept for the outline of the lesson came from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary. It teaches about **Caring for One Another**. The **study's aim** is to explore how we should care for one another and to do what is expected of us. The **study's application** is to know that sometimes what is required of us may be beyond the call of duty and that we should step forward and do it.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Give Care

At the church where my wife and I worship, the service we attend often concludes not with the frequently heard expression “Have a great day!” but with the challenge, “Give a great day!” Worshipers are thus encouraged to continue their service outside the walls of the church building. In a similar manner, one could alter the expression “Take care” (often used just before parting company with someone) to “Give care.” That phrase comes closer to expressing a Christian’s outlook and the theme of today’s study: “Caring for One Another.” Our lesson today, the final one from the book of Ruth, focuses on how Boaz carried out a selfless act as Ruth’s “kinsman.” What he does in today’s Scripture text is consistent with his “second mile” attitude throughout the book and reflects a life characterized by caring for others.

Lesson Background: Kinsman

Much of the background to today’s study is the same as that of the previous two lessons; thus that material need not be repeated here. Instead, we will provide a bit of background on the concept of kinsman in Old Testament Israel, an important role of Boaz in today’s lesson. The work of a kinsman or redeemer is set forth in the Law of Moses. There it is seen to include buying back family land that had been sold because of financial need (Leviticus 25:25), buying back a relative who had become a slave to another because of financial need (Leviticus 25:47–49), and avenging the killing of a relative (Numbers 35:16–21). In short, the kinsman stood up for family members who might be vulnerable to mistreatment because of difficult circumstances that had befallen them. Naomi was quite pleased when she learned that Boaz was the man in whose field Ruth had gleaned, for Naomi recognized him to be “one of our kinsman-redeemers” (Ruth 2:20). Later Naomi encouraged Ruth to prepare herself and approach Boaz with the idea of having him carry out the role of a kinsman by marrying her. This would preserve the family line of Elimelech (Naomi’s deceased husband) through the children of Boaz and Ruth. The Law of Moses does not say anything about marriage as one of the duties of the kinsman. Even so, it seems that this would have been one of the responsibilities that a kinsman could carry out as part of his obligation to help a family member in a desperate situation. Having no heirs to carry on one’s name was “bad news” in the ancient world. After Ruth had in essence “proposed” to Boaz on the threshing floor (Ruth 3:9), Boaz pointed out that there was another kinsman who was a closer relative than he to the family of Elimelech (3:12). Boaz, being a man of integrity, would not bypass the other kinsman to fulfill Ruth’s request. Thus Boaz told Ruth, “If he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives I will do it” (Ruth 3:13). When Ruth reported to Naomi what had occurred at the threshing floor, the insightful mother-in-law recognized that Boaz would address such an important matter as soon as possible (3:18). This is exactly what Boaz proceeded to do in today’s printed text.

Lesson Background: Intercultural Marriage

Before diving into today’s text, perhaps some comments should be added regarding the marriage of Boaz (an Israelite) to Ruth (a Moabitess). She was not part of the covenant people. Did this marriage violate the Law of Moses? The law did include certain restrictions about a Moabite not being part of “the assembly of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 23:3), thus limiting their participation in worship. Marrying a Moabite, however, was not specifically prohibited by the law. During the time of Ezra centuries later, “mixed marriages” between Israelites and such peoples as the Moabites were considered offensive and a threat to the purity of

the covenant people. Thus action was taken to dissolve such marriages (Ezra 9:1, 2; 10:1–5; compare Nehemiah 13:23–37). It must be remembered that at that time in Israel's history, following the Babylonian captivity, it was crucial that God's people remain separate from the idolatrous influence of peoples such as the Moabites. This separation would help ensure that the Israelites would not become guilty (again) of the sins that had led to the captivity. With Ruth's marriage to Boaz, the danger of being swayed by idolatrous practices did not exist. Ruth had affirmed without reservation her allegiance to the God of Israel and had severed ties with her Moabite background. One might say she had been "converted" to the covenant people. Thus, despite her Moabite nationality, there was no danger of the family line of Elimelech being "tainted" by Boaz's marriage to Ruth. Because of their common bond of faith in the God of Israel, Boaz and Ruth were not, to use Paul's language, "unequally yoked" (2 Corinthians 6:14, King James Version).

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Acts describes a beautiful situation: "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need" (4:32, 34-35). What a wonderful example of believers caring for one another! Some had more material goods than others, and some apparently were very poor. Those with plenty made certain that those with little had enough. What made this even better was that this was voluntary sharing and not something commanded by the leaders of the church. God put it in the hearts of His people to care for one another. It was a living demonstration of the love God's children should have for each other, as Boaz had for Ruth. Life is full of rules, duties, and obligations. But sometimes we are called to do more than what is required of us simply because it is right in those circumstances. Think of the young husband who finds out a week after getting married that his wife has cancer. Or think of the person who buys a home only to find out that he has been cheated and the home does not have the value he thought it did. Or think of Joseph in the Bible, who found out that his wife to be was pregnant. There are, or were, some tough choices to make in each of these situations. As Christians we are called to go beyond the call of duty to do what is right. In our lesson this week, we learn about Boaz, who not only took on the task of helping Ruth establish herself but went beyond that call to marry her.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Caring Takes Planning (Ruth 4:1-2)

1 Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there; and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz said, "Come aside, friend, sit down here." So he came aside and sat down.

2 And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down.

Plan the place

Plan the place by believing in God's directions (Gen 22:2-5)

2 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." 3

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Plan the place by being obedient (Acts 8:26-29)

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road — the desert road — that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

Plan the place through Divine guidance (Acts 16:6-10)

6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Plan the place to accomplish a specific purpose (Est 4:12-14)

12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

Plan the place through God's arrangement (1 Cor 12:18)

18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

Plan for the right people

Right people who are godly leaders (Acts 15:22)

22 Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers.

Right people who are godly workers (Acts 6:3)

3 Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them

Right people who are godly marriage partners (2 Cor 6:14)

14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

Right people who are godly friends (Prov 22:24)

24 Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered,

Right people who are godly worldly associates (James 4:4)

4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

Right people who have been godly approved (1 Cor 16:3)

3 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.

Caring Costs (Ruth 4:3-6)

3 Then he said to the close relative, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, sold the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech.

4 And I thought to inform you, saying, 'Buy it back in the presence of the inhabitants and the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am next after you.'" And he said, "I will redeem it."

5 Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also buy it from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance."

6 And the close relative said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem it."

Cost of resources

Cost of resources to follow God (Mark 10:21)

21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Cost of resources to be in the kingdom of heaven (Matt 13:44)

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Cost of resources to supply needs of others (Acts 2:44-45)

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

Cost of resources for support the Church (Acts 4:34-35)

34 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Cost of personal desires

Cost of desires that are contrary to the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:17)

17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

Cost of desires that belong to our sinful nature (Col 3:5-6)

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

Cost of desires that do not submit to God (Rom 8:7-8)

7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

Cost of desires that come from our own lusts and enticements (James 1:14)

14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

Cost of desires that we should abstain from (1 Peter 2:11)

11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

Cost of privilege

The privilege of birthright (Gen 25:30-34)

30 He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.) 31 Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." 32 "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?" 33 But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.

The privilege of being a disciple (Matt 26:14-16)

14 Then one of the Twelve — the one called Judas Iscariot — went to the chief priests 15 and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. 16 From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

The privilege of being an attending God's banquet (Luke 14:16-21)

16 Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. 17 At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' 18 "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' 19 "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' 20 "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' 21 "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

The privilege of our souls (Matt 16:24-26)

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Caring Takes Commitment (Ruth 4:7-10)

7 Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging, to confirm anything: one man took off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was a confirmation in Israel.

8 Therefore the close relative said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself." So he took off his sandal.

9 And Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, from the hand of Naomi.

10 Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from his position at the gate. You are witnesses this day."

Commitment to integrity

Those with integrity cannot be shaken (Ps 15:2-5)

2 He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart
3 and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, 4 who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the Lord, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, 5 who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.

Those with integrity please God (1 Chron 29:17)

17 I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you.

Integrity guides the Just (Prov 11:3)

3 The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.

Those with integrity are trustworthy (Luke 16:11-12)

11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

Those with integrity have hope even during trials (Ps 25:21)

21 May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you.

God knows His own and the level of their integrity (Job 2:3)

3 Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason."

Commitment to family

Committed to family through service (Mark 15:40-41)

40 Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. 41 In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

Committed to family through faith (2 Tim 1:5)

5 I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

Committed to a family that is mature in Christ (Deut 4:9)

9 Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

Committed to a family that praises each other (Prov 31:27-28)

27 She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. 28 Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:

Committed to a family that is obedient to its head (1 Tim 3:4)

4 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.

Committed to a family that is committed to unity (Ps 133:1)

133 How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

These three lessons from Ruth have highlighted the importance of caring for others. Boaz's initiative and "second mile" spirit are certainly worth imitating. Today's lesson reveals another way in which Boaz serves as a model for us: he takes care to follow proper channels in accomplishing his goal of helping Ruth. There is no "the end justifies the means" attitude here. Boaz did not simply spring into action without considering how best to carry out his plan. Today's Scripture passage reflects careful attention to detail—going to the town gate, waiting for the other kinsman to arrive, convening 10 of the elders, and then clearly laying out in the presence of witnesses what he had in mind to do. Our enthusiasm for Christ should not prevent us from paying proper attention to laws, regulations, or anything else that falls under the category of "the right way to do things." Our respect for those matters is part of our testimony for Christ. Paul's advice in 2 Corinthians 8:21 still applies: "We are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men."

Many have commented on how Boaz's actions as a kinsman-redeemer foreshadows that of Jesus as the Redeemer of humanity. The New Testament itself makes no such link, thus one should be cautious about pressing any connection too rigidly. However, when the position of redeemer is considered in light of Old Testament descriptions of the Lord as Redeemer (Psalms 19:14; 130:8; Isaiah 59:20; 63:16), the links can be justified. Of course, Jesus' work as Redeemer far outweighs anything Boaz could ever achieve. Boaz went the second mile for Ruth's earthly well-being; Jesus made an immeasurable journey, from Heaven to earth, to redeem lost humanity for eternity.

Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

When Christians hear the word "redeem," they understandably attach deeply spiritual associations to the idea. After all, Jesus Christ is our Redeemer; He paid the redemption price with His own blood to deliver us from the grip of sin and death. We sing glorious hymns extolling the wonder of being redeemed. No one would likely be moved to sing any hymns about the idea of redemption as it is used in our text here. Boaz was talking, quite prosaically, about a property transfer. Naomi was selling a parcel of land. To keep the property from falling out of the family's possession, a close relative had the right (actually, the duty) to redeem it, to buy it back if he could. Boaz explained what was at stake and then said to Naomi's relative, "If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it." The parcel of land was his if he wanted it and could put up the funds. If he did not want to take it or could not, he needed to say so right away, for Boaz was next in line as a relative to Naomi (or her deceased husband, Elimelech). When Boaz said, "There is none to redeem it beside thee," he meant that there was no one who could do so aside from the two of them. This unnamed relative was apparently the only other living family member who could exercise the right of redemption, but Boaz was "after" him. Boaz was willing to do it, but he had to give the closer relation the opportunity first. Only if that man waived his right (and responsibility) to do so would Boaz proceed. As outlined above, this all seems incredibly dry and mundane. But readers of the book of Ruth know there is a little more to it than this. What Boaz really wanted to do was redeem Ruth — that is, exercise his right as a relative of her deceased husband to provide security for her by marrying her. It was what Ruth had requested at Naomi's behest (Ruth 3:1 -9), and Boaz was delighted to oblige (vs. 10). Boaz had already shown great admiration for Ruth's virtuous character and sacrificial devotion to Naomi. She was the caliber of woman he would be pleased to have as his wife, even though she was evidently quite a bit younger. There was only one hitch. Another relative was more closely related and thus would have prior claim to be Ruth's redeemer. When

Boaz met with this relative, however, he initially presented only the property aspect of the redemption. He did not mention marriage to Ruth at the outset. Why? To him, marrying Ruth was the compelling reason for taking on the redemption role; the land was secondary. But he apparently discerned that to the other relative, the property acquisition would be the paramount attraction. Marriage to Ruth, as it turned out, was not desirable to this man. Perhaps we can see in this a further demonstration of Boaz's integrity. Rather than immediately dampen the relative's interest, he made the deal as attractive as possible, potentially to his own loss. It was only when the man had full knowledge of the benefits to him that Boaz laid out the further obligation. Happily for him (and for Ruth, no doubt), the man wanted no part of that.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. God's work should always be done in a way that is proper and timely (Ruth 4:1-2)
2. Honesty should be the rule of every Christian presentation (Ruth 4:3-4; cf. Eph. 4:25)
3. Wise is the person who listens carefully before speaking (Ruth 4:5-6; cf. Prov. 18:13)
4. Caring for others is seldom without cost to oneself (Ruth 4:6; cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; 8:9)
5. The wise person gathers witnesses to all important public decisions (Ruth 4:7-8; cf. Matt. 18:16)
6. The Christian should do his godly duty without reservation (Ruth 4:9-10; cf. Col. 3:23)

Heart of the Lesson from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

The events described in the book of Ruth took place "in the days when the judges ruled" (Ruth 1:1). This was a period of great apostasy in Israel, when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25). It is important to keep this in mind as we study the book of Ruth, for this little book is a ray of sunshine in a dark period of history. Boaz especially stands out as a godly man in an ungodly age. Boaz showed compassion for the poor and needy by opening his fields to gleaners, as the law of God instructed. In particular, he demonstrated loving concern for the young widow Ruth who had left her homeland to accompany Naomi back to Bethlehem. He had even allowed her to work alongside his workers in the field, and he had fed her as he had his hired men. Boaz's concern for Ruth and his obedience to God's law are seen in one final incident in Ruth 4. The law provided for the inheritance of a man who died without a child. A near relative was to take his widow and raise up a son to carry on the dead man's name and inheritance (Deut. 25:5-6). As a relative, Boaz could perform this duty. Yet, as Ruth 3 shows, this was not a burden for Boaz. He was more than willing to take Ruth as his wife and to redeem her dead husband's property, and he made that clear when she presented herself to him at the threshing floor. One obstacle stood in the way, however; there was another man who was nearer of kin. He would have to relinquish his right to Ruth in order for Boaz to marry her.

Boaz's offer (Ruth 4:1-6)

Legal proceedings took place at the city gate, and that was where Boaz met the nearer relative and gathered witnesses. Boaz outlined the situation, and the man was inclined to redeem the property until he learned this would also mean marrying Ruth. He then deferred to Boaz, surrendering his right to redemption.

Boaz's action (Ruth 4:7-8)

The simple act of removing one's sandal and giving it to another person symbolized the transference of the right of redemption. The kinsman removed his sandal and offered it to Boaz. By receiving it in the presence of witnesses, Boaz was accepting the responsibility to redeem the deceased's property and marry Ruth. Boaz risked losing Ruth by following this procedure, but he was willing to do so in order to follow the law completely.

Boaz's witnesses (Ruth 4:9-10)

Boaz then reaffirmed verbally that he was purchasing all the land that belonged to Elimelech and his sons and that he was marrying Ruth and thus raising "up the name of the dead." He reminded those present that they were witnesses to this legally binding act. Like most legal proceedings, those described in this passage are not very exciting. Yet they remind us that even in the midst of ungodliness and disorder, people who are

willing to follow the Lord's way and show compassion and love for others ultimately will be honored by the Lord Himself. The love and concern of Boaz brought lasting joy to Ruth, Naomi, and himself and eventually brought to the throne of Israel the great King David (Ruth 4:17). Narratives like Ruth's reveal that the genealogy of Messiah is filled with compassion for outsiders that foreshadowed the reconciliation of the world to God.