

People of the Book: Ruth
Ruth 1:15-19
July 11, 2010

Don't you love a good comeback? Don't you love it when the underdog wins? It does our hearts good to see someone get back up after they've been knocked down by the tragedies of life. That's the story of the book of Ruth.

The story begins with Ruth as a young woman. She marries a husband with strong family ties. They begin building a life together. But in a few short years her family is demolished by death. Ruth's husband, father-in-law, and brother-in-law all three die. Ruth, Orpah, and their mother-in-law, Naomi, have to start over.

Those here who have been through suffering and the death of those close to us know how Ruth felt. Psychologists have noticed five stages grieving people go through: denial and isolation; anger; bargaining; depression; and acceptance. We don't know where Ruth was in this process when her mother-in-law announced she was returning to her own hometown of Bethlehem. But I imagine she hadn't had enough time yet to feel like moving from her homeland.

When you hear that they are going to Bethlehem, perhaps you pick up on the significance of Naomi's home town. Bethlehem was the small town where the Savior, Jesus, would be born! So right away our spiritual antennae go up.

This story then is not just about the redemption of one Moabite woman named Ruth. It is the story of the redemption of us all! Look deeper into this story and you see yourself!

The story of Ruth contains at least three helpful principles for starting over when you don't feel like it.

1. FIND SOMEONE ELSE WHO IS HURTING AND BE A POSITIVE FORCE IN THEIR LIFE.

We are constantly being bombarded with the message of the world: "Look out for #1". The problem with that philosophy is that it never provides spiritual fulfillment. How ironic; what your heart desires won't come from looking only after yourself; it comes from looking after the needs of others. We must love our neighbors as ourselves. (Mt. 22:39)

Somewhere underneath the surface of this story there's a motivation for Ruth staying with her mother-in-law and I think this may be the first clue. Surely her mother-in-law must have treated her like she was her own daughter. There must have been quite a bond of love between them for Ruth to go back with Naomi to a land she didn't know anything about.

In Ruth 1:16-17 we find Ruth making the following statement to Naomi:

"Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!"

WOW! That's commitment! What would cause someone to make a commitment like that? I don't think you can make a commitment like that thinking only about yourself. I think true godly commitments are made when we're also thinking about the welfare and needs of others! That's why I believe Ruth was motivated to go with Naomi. She knew Naomi had lost so much that she **NEEDED A FRIEND.**

It's also probably one of the reasons God blessed Ruth in the end of this story. God **USES** and **BLESSES** people who don't get all wrapped up in themselves all the time! And the interesting thing is, **WE HELP OURSELVES OUT OF TROUBLE WHEN WE DECIDE TO HELP OTHERS OUT OF TROUBLE.**

You see, we usually get a bad case of the blues when we're focused on ourselves. Focus on meeting the needs of someone else and see if it's not the best possible medicine for you! God made us that way on purpose. He wants us to be like Him – always giving...unselfish...ministering to the needs of others. That's where the joy in life comes from.

When you **DON'T FEEL LIKE STARTING OVER**, when you can't get motivated, find a hurt and heal it. Find a need and meet it. Find a fellow pilgrim who is discouraged and try to give them comfort.

The second powerful principle for **STARTING OVER WHEN YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE IT...**

2. SINCE YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO TAKE RISKS IN LIFE, TAKE SOME FOR GOD!

Some of us are greater risk takers than others but even a turtle has to stick his neck out to get anywhere in life. Since we're forced to take some calculated risks (like getting in our cars and driving to church today) why not take some for the One who has done so much for us?

Naomi of her son (Ruth's husband) probably taught Ruth about their God, Yahweh. In some way Ruth surely must have been able to sense something was different about the God the Hebrews worshipped. The pagan deities of Moab weren't doing Ruth any good so she took a chance on finding out more about Yahweh.

Her sister-in-law was different. She went back to her old gods. (v. 15) Perhaps this was because she was afraid to change. Resistance to change holds a lot of people back in life, especially in the area of true spirituality. Some folks would rather stay with what they know, even if in their heart and mind they know it's wrong. It's safer for them that way. No risk involved.

Madeleine L'Engle wrote, "A drying well will often lead the spirit to the river that flows from the throne of God." When we realize, at some point in life (often when facing personal tragedy), that our own inner resources for dealing with trouble are running out, that our well is drying up, if we are to survive, at that point, we must find the endless resources ("the river") of God. Sometimes, that understanding of our own helplessness comes as we face an addiction, some incurable illness, or our inability to make someone else be what we want him or her to be. There's no more kidding ourselves, we can't lick the problem on our own, our well is dry. We either find the river or we die.

Commit more of your life to your relationship with Christ. Seek more fervently who he wishes you to be. You can risk change for Christ! "He rewards those who earnestly seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6)

That brings me to our third principle for STARTING OVER WHEN YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE IT:

3. EXPECT GREAT THINGS FROM GOD!

Ruth became the great-grandmother to King David! How did this happen? Someone in Ruth's deceased husband's family had to buy back or "redeem" the right to own the land in Israel that would have belonged to him. That "kinsman redeemer," as they called him, was Boaz. But don't misunderstand, this wasn't just a business deal - it is a love story! Boaz didn't want the land; he wanted Ruth's hand in marriage. He had fallen in love with her watching her commitment to her mother-in-law and her gleaning in the barley fields.

So he goes through the proper channels and legally becomes her husband. God blesses them with a child - Obed, the father of Jesse, the grandfather of David. David became the greatest king of Israel, "the man after God's own heart."

Who would ever have dreamed an outsider, a Moabite woman, would be in the very lineage of Christ Himself? GOD DID!

God knew you before you were born. He knows what's going on in your life right now! You can expect great things from Him if you will take risks for Him like Ruth did. You can expect great things from Him if you will look after the needs of others and not just your own needs.

And you know what else? He made a way to be our "kinsman redeemer"! He sent His only Son to die on the cross in our place. Jesus purchased heaven for us on that cross. We can't make it to heaven on our own. We're sinners – heavenly outsiders like Ruth. But God is rich in His grace. He loves to bless people. If you'll only give Him a chance there is no end to the great things He can do!