

# The Proposal

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I imagine that most of you know about Sadie Hawkins Day. It's simply a day of traditional dating role reversals—a day where women ask men to go-out on dates. It's popularity skyrocketed in the United States from the early 1940s thru the 1950s, before the modern feminist movement gained prominence. In those days, it was seen as a “women-empowering rite”—by giving women the chance to take the initiative in regard to dating relationships.<sup>1</sup>

Well, today we're going to see an ancient version of this. We're going to see how Naomi and Ruth pursue Boaz. We're going to see how this plan takes courage and faith, and entails great risk for these two women. Yet, more than all these things, we find that this proposal from Ruth to Boaz reveals something about what we want. It reveals a desire that we have—which points us ultimately to Christ Jesus.

Let's read chapter three and begin to see how.

### **Ruth 3:1-18**

**3** One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, “My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for.”<sup>2</sup> Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor.<sup>3</sup> Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking.<sup>4</sup> When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.”

<sup>5</sup> “I will do whatever you say,” Ruth answered. <sup>6</sup> So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

<sup>7</sup> When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. <sup>8</sup> In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned—and there was a woman lying at his feet!

<sup>9</sup> “Who are you?” he asked.

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<sup>1</sup> You can read more on the genesis of Sadie Hawkins Day [here](#).

“I am your servant Ruth,” she said. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family.”

<sup>10</sup> “The Lord bless you, my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. <sup>11</sup> And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character. <sup>12</sup> Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I. <sup>13</sup> Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.”

<sup>14</sup> So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, “No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor.”

<sup>15</sup> He also said, “Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.” When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her. Then he went back to town.

<sup>16</sup> When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, “How did it go, my daughter?”

Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her <sup>17</sup> and added, “He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, ‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’”

<sup>18</sup> Then Naomi said, “Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.”

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As we study this text, we want to ask two questions of it. (1<sup>st</sup>) We want to ask: **What kind of proposal is this?** We want to try to put the scene in its original context as much as is possible. This will give us a better understanding of what’s happening. (2<sup>nd</sup>) We want to ask: **What kind of redeemer is Boaz?** This is a central question because Boaz is evidently not the only or even primary choice for their redemption. Consequently, we should reflect on what we think of Boaz and why.

Let’s look at each of these questions in turn.

## 1. What kind of proposal is this?

I want to answer this question by unpacking two things about Ruth's proposal. The first is this.

### - Ruth's proposal is calculated.

Let's get to the elephant in the room right away. When Naomi makes this plan, she is leveraging Ruth's sexual allure. There is absolutely no way around this fact. Why else would she tell Ruth to wash and put on perfume as well as her best clothes? Why else would it take place when Boaz is by himself and under cover of darkness? And, why would Naomi tell Ruth to lay next to him? These aren't our modern ways, nevertheless they communicate to us; don't they?

There's also another fact that pushes in this direction. It's the setting of it all—the threshing floor. For the ancient reader, this seals the deal about the sexual charge of this proposal. Harvest festivals were closely associated with fertility of every kind whether in farming or the family. So, as one scholar explains: "...the popular mind associated threshing floors with licentiousness."<sup>2</sup>

Now, why do I bring all this up? Well, the point is that Naomi has an aim here, and Ruth is carrying out a very calculated plan to win a husband. The Bible is honest about all this. Scripture isn't shy about human behavior. And, note how it's reported. This plan isn't condoned. Nobody says this is the right way to go about wooing Boaz. God doesn't ever condone using one's sexuality in this way. The text simply tells us that this is the plan that Naomi concocted. The Bible just states the raw human facts of the matter—facts that seem consistent to how men and women actually interact in such matters.

Friends, the story doesn't offer them as role-models here. They're just people like you and me. Sometimes they make good decisions and sometimes bad decisions. Consequently, I tend to see this as a less than admirable plan.

This brings us to the second thing we need to unpack.

### - Ruth's proposal is courageous.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *The Book of Ruth*, 201.

It's courageous since it entails risks. Naomi and Ruth stand to lose everything if things go south on the threshing floor—if this plan fails. And, there are many ways for it to fail; there are many ways it could head south quite quickly.

Here are a few examples of how they stand to lose.

- **First**, Boaz could be appalled and offended by Ruth's aggressiveness. He might see this as the action of a sexually immoral person. If he does, Ruth and Naomi's meal ticket could be gone—along with any respect which they've earned around Bethlehem.
- **Second**, Boaz could be less honorable than Naomi is counting on him to be. He could easily take advantage of this situation for his own gain then walk-away from Ruth, denying any responsibility.
- **Finally**, Boaz may accept this proposal, but Ruth might be seen leaving in the morning. In a shame and honor culture like ancient Israel's was, word of this would be disastrous for Boaz, Ruth, and even for Naomi. We get the sense of this when Boaz encourages Ruth to leave quietly without being seen by anyone (v. 14).

These are just three risks, but there surely could've been more that Ruth faced. Certainly, she trusted in Naomi's advice. Certainly, she believed in Boaz's kindness and honorable character. Certainly, she also had a decent amount of self-confidence, that she wasn't unwanted or unattractive. Nevertheless, there was a good deal riding on this proposal; there was a lot at stake.

Shoot, I remember asking my wife on a date for the first time. I was shaking in my shoes. What did I have to lose? A little bit of self-esteem? A moment or two of awkwardness? I had nothing at stake compared to Ruth.

Friends, Ruth is admirably courageous here. We shouldn't miss her bravery, even if the plan she and Naomi are concocting is flawed and ill-advised. She's brave. She's courageous. In fact, I think we might learn something from this flawed plan and its execution. I think we can learn something about how the Lord is able to use what we do—even when it's not perfect—for his good purposes. You see, friends, sometimes we wait and wait and wait and plan and plan and plan, yet we are reluctant to step-out bravely and act. We are reluctant to trust the Lord to use our very human

and imperfect plans for his redemptive purposes. Yet, that's the testimony we see over and over again in Scripture. It's the testimony we see here.

Friends, don't think too highly of yourselves. Trust that God can use you!

Well, this brings us to our second and final question.

## **2. What kind of redeemer is Boaz?**

It seems he's a pretty darn, good one. He receives Ruth's forthright proposal with humility. In fact, he is flattered by it (v. 10). He quickly calms any fears in her by telling Ruth that he's certainly willing to be her redeemer and husband (v. 11). There is no hint of sexual impropriety between them. In fact, Boaz is so honorable that he must pursue her in accordance with the Law of the Lord (v. 12).

And, this is where we encounter a considerable amount of narrative tension because we find that there is a relative who is closer to Naomi and Ruth than Boaz. We learn that this man must deny any intention to be the guardian redeemer of Ruth and Naomi before Boaz can pursue her as his wife.

Look at what he tells Ruth.

*Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer...there is another who is more closely related than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives I will do it (vv. 12-13).*

Here's a fun fact about me. I'm a total sucker for television or movie versions of Jane Austen novels. Probably my favorite was the version of *Pride and Prejudice* with Keira Knightley as Elizabeth Bennet and Matthew Macfadyen as Mr. Darcy. Joe Wright, in my opinion, did a wonderful job as director. From the cinematography to the casting to the costumes, it was a delightful rendition of Austen's classic book, and I highly recommend it to you.

If you know anything about the storyline in *Pride and Prejudice* then you know that it tosses you back and forth between hatred of Mr. Darcy as a suitor for Elizabeth and love for him as her only possible match. By the end, you're begging and pleading in every scene for them to confess their love for one another—to *not end up alone!* No one else will do for Elizabeth. It simply can't be anyone else.

Well, as we read the Book of Ruth, as we begin to feel the tension that arises when another possible guardian-redeemer emerges, if we're monitoring our feelings, then we will notice that the author of Ruth is expertly manipulating all of our desires for more than any old redeemer. We want Boaz for Ruth. *No one else will do!*

Look, let's step-back for a moment to ask ourselves what makes this the case. Why is Boaz the only satisfying choice? Why is Boaz the right guardian-redeemer? This is an important question to ask. Our author is clearly leading us in this direction. Why exactly is he doing this? What's the point?

Well, here are a couple points that are most certainly not being made.

- It's not about the prosperity of Naomi and Ruth. We're not weighing what Boaz can provide financially against what some other redeemer might be able to provide for them. Shoot, for all we know, this new guy could be the richest dude in town. So, it's not about financial well-being or prosperity for these two women.
- It's not about abiding by the letter of God's laws. If we were concerned about that, then we would all want this new guy. After all, he's the first or the primary candidate according to the laws of kinship-redemption. So, we don't want Boaz out of a desire to do things as their spelled-out by the statutes of the law. That can't be the reason we want him.

So, if these aren't motivating our desire for Boaz as the redeemer, what is? What makes him the only acceptable choice?

It's Boaz's love and respect for Ruth; isn't it? It's his willingness to sacrifice for her and Naomi that makes us root for him. It's his graciousness and generosity toward those who are needy and marginalized that makes Boaz the right redeemer. We want him because he won't redeem out of mere duty but out of deep compassion and care for Ruth. Boaz is the one who volunteers to sacrifice and love and redeem. This is what we want for Ruth and Naomi. *This is why we demand Boaz!*

And, friends, if we're being honest, this is what we want in a redeemer as well. There is something in each one of us that doesn't simply want someone who provides for our needs. There is an urge in all of us to not simply have someone who is faithful to us because the law requires it. *Nobody wants that kind of relationship!*

Instead, we long for a redeemer who desires to know us deeply and intimately. We long for a savior who is gracious and generous out of love, not out of obligation. This is the deep desire that each one of us has. We long for this type of Redeemer—this type of Savior. In fact, you and I were created for this very relationship.

Friends, we long for Boaz because his person speaks of our universal longing for a greater Redeemer—Jesus Christ. Boaz points forward to his redemptive work. Boaz points forward to Christ’s redemptive love. All humanity was created for him. We were created for relationship with Jesus. No other redeemer can ever satisfy us. No other redeemer can ever love us. *Only Christ Jesus can! Only Christ Jesus has! And, therefore, only Christ Jesus will do! Amen.*