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Title: Beach Reads Ruth: Gleaning

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Scripture: [Deuteronomy 24:19-22](#)

Text: [Ruth 2:10-13](#)

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When there is rain there is a grain and when there is grain there will be bread in the house of bread. That's where we left off last week in our Bible beach read on the book of Ruth. Today, Ruth is going to see the grain up close and personal. This is the 9th year we've looked at stories in the Bible that read like they are blockbuster vacation

novels. This year, the story is a romance with just a hint of tragedy; if made into a movie, it'd be a chick flick. All the tragedy is behind us and what's left is romance. But before we get there, let's do a little catch-up because some of you didn't make it last week and all of us have slept since then.

Our story comes from the 12th century BC and starts with a farmer, his wife, and two sons. They leave the hill country of Judah because there was no rain and when there is no rain, there is no grain and when there is no grain there is no bread in the house of bread. They journey to the kingdom of Moab. The Moabites and Israelites, though distant cousins, were enemies. But the faithful farmer traveled there nevertheless, trusting that God would watch over just as God protected Israel when they were aliens in the land of Egypt. The farmer named Elimelech takes his pleasant wife Naomi, their two sons Mahlon and Chilin and settle in "some-where Moab."

Almost immediately things don't go as planned. Their sons marry Orpah and Ruth, Moabite women, even though Jews were strictly forbidden from marrying outside of the faith. But despite the injunction, Elimelech and Naomi love their daughters-in-law and they love them back. Tragedy strikes when Elimelech dies leaving Naomi a widow. Fortunately, her sons provide for her, for the next ten years. Then, tragically, they too die. Naomi and her daughters-in-law are all widows. When it comes to the 12th century BC, they are the lowest of the low, widows without male family to care for them.

At this very moment, one of the most famous scenes in the Bible takes place. On a dusty road outside of "somewhere" Moab, Naomi stands with her daughters-in-law, pleading with them to go home to their families. She is

headed back to Judah to live as a pauper, depending on the generosity of others. She's crying, they are crying, we are all crying as we looking at the pathetic scene. Naomi says, "My future is over; your future is with your family. Go home." Orpah does but Ruth says, "No way. Because of your loving-kindness and steadfast love, because of your faith in God, I'm going with you. Don't push me away because..." "Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God." (Ruth 1:16b) It's a powerful, emotional scene of love, not just of the love of a daughter-in-law to a mother-in-law, but of loving God and God's love, the Jewish concept call "hesed." With the statement, Ruth converts, embracing Yahweh even as she embraces Naomi. Ruth says, "I want what you have. I want to love like you love. I want to touch God the way you experience God. I want to be someone who is perceived as filled with loving-kindness, with *"hesed."*

Naomi lets her stay with her. Why wouldn't she, given that powerful speech? The two head back to Bethlehem to an uncertain future because Naomi doesn't know, maybe even doesn't think that any of her husband's family are still living. As the sun set on last week's beach read they walk into Bethlehem just as the barley harvest was beginning. Everyone was talking about Naomi's return, her bitter attitude, and the strange Moabite woman who has so lovingly, generously embraced not just Naomi, but God.

That's where we pick up our story today. The way it reads, the next day Ruth turns to Naomi and says, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor." (Ruth 2:2) How does she know to ask? How has she gleaned the information about gleaning? Somehow, some way, Ruth understood. Maybe it was from her father-in-law. He was a faithful farmer. Maybe it was from her husband, who likely was a farmer too. Maybe it was something that Naomi shared on the long walk back to Bethlehem. I could easily imagine Ruth saying, "How will we eat?" And Naomi, who was turning sour on God every step of the way, would have at least said, 'God has set up a system where we can get food. It's called gleaning. God told the farmers, "Whenever you are reaping the harvest of your field and you leave some grain in the field, don't go back and get it. Let it go to the immigrants, the orphans, and the widows...."' (Deuteronomy 24:19) God said the same thing about olives trees and grapes. Elimelech always did it because God said, "Let the leftovers go to the immigrants, the orphans, and the widows." (Deuteronomy 24:21)¹

So a day or two after their arrival in Bethlehem, Ruth turns to Naomi and says, "Let me go glean..." Naomi says "Go" and as far as we know, for the first time in her life, Ruth begs for food. She begs for the opportunity to glean, searching for the leftover barley grain dropped by the reapers. There

had to be a lot of anxiety, concern about safety. Whatever field she chose, and there were many to choose from, she had to ask permission and even though it was the law, some might say no. There were likely other gleaners already there, other aliens, widows, and orphans who have looked at her as if to say, "this is my field and I'm not sharing it with you." The reapers were young men who might see a young foreign woman and think bad thoughts or worse, act on them. She was putting herself in harm's way. But, out of compassion and love for Naomi, she gleaned for food.

She finds the field, asks for permission and it is granted. And from early in the morning she begins to follow the reapers. Harvesting barley by hand is hard work. The men in front of her go through the field sickle in hand. They swing the sharp blade through the sheaves, grabbing more than a hand full of cut stalks. With seasoned practice, they'd take a single stalk and wrap it around the bunch, tie them in a bundle and then, throw the sheaves in pile on the side of the field. Then, it began again, over and over, doing the work of binding sheaves in less than a minute as they move through the field. It is hard work but not precise. By its very nature, there are leftovers and Ruth, was successful gleaning the leftovers. It was a good field and she was doing good work. But why that field? Of all the fields she could have chosen, why this one? What caused her to be led to this very spot? The author says it this way "As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech..." (Ruth 2:3b)

As it happened, of all the fields that she could have chosen, she found the one that had a relative of her deceased father-in-law, Elimelech. As it happened? It just happened? At this very moment, Ruth knows nothing about it. Naomi didn't think anyone was left in Elimelech's family, that they were destined to be poor widows gleaning for the rest of their lives, depending on leftovers. Without a male in the family, there was no a kinsman-redeemer, a concept that Ruth might not have even been aware of. You might not be aware of it.

A male family member could serve as a kinsman-redeemer, taking on all of the belongings and responsibilities of the deceased husband. As it happened, Ruth was completely unaware that she was led to the very place where something amazing was about to unfold. But as it happened, God has slipped in, unnoticed, from the side, to redeem and rescue Naomi and Ruth and open the door to our future.² Because this is God's story and as you will see in the end, it is our story. "As it happened" has God's hand all over it.

As it happened, Boaz shows up mid-way through the day and all of the women in the movie theater, if we are watching this story as chick-flick, suck in their breath. The handsome redeemer arrives like a knight in shining

armor. As he smiles at the camera, there is a twinkle from his teeth. He is a man of standing, of prominence, rich, single and faithful because the very first thing he does is shout out to the reapers, "The Lord be with you!" And they look up from their work and shout back, "The Lord be with you!" Wow. What a guy, what a spiritual workplace he's created. Amazing; he's the perfect candidate for next season's "The Bachelor."

Boaz surveys the field, sees how things are going and then he spots someone at the edge of the field. A woman catches his eye. So he says to his foreman. "Who is that young woman? Who does she belong to and why is she working so hard? The supervisor said, "She is the one the entire town has been talking about, the Moabite woman who made a commitment to love Naomi and our God, the one filled with "hesed." I tell you what. She's the real deal. She hasn't stopped since she got here this morning."

What do you do with information like that? This is what Boaz does. He walks across the field toward Ruth. I'm sure when Ruth looked up, her heart was in her throat. She thinks, "Here it comes. I'm going to get kicked off the field, run off from taking the leftover grain." Or maybe she even thought the worst. She knows the history between the Moabites and the Israelites. It has to be in the back of her mind.

But because Boaz is such a gentle man of faith, that's just the opposite of what he does. He immediately puts her at ease and says, "My daughter, it's fine what you are doing. In fact, don't go elsewhere. Stay right here gleaning on my field. I want you to be safe so stay nearby the young women. And if you get thirsty, the men have water to drink. Ask them. They won't bother you, I promise."

Ruth looks up at this good-looking older man, exuding confidence and authority and with gratitude falls to the ground at his feet. Thank you, but "Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me when I am a foreigner?" (Ruth 2:10) He says, "As it happens, I know about you. Everybody knows about you, about the death of your husband and your loving-kindness and commitment to Naomi and God." "May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!" (Ruth 2:12) Ruth looks up and says, ""May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants." (Ruth 2:13) I told you this is a romance and it all begins there. That enchanted moment, the look, the smile, the recognition of chemistry, the giddy awkward feeling in the stomach. This is the moment when, if on that date watching this chick-flick, there's a sniffle and a snuggle and everyone is getting cozy in the theater because, you're

seeing the spark of first love. You're thinking, "Go ahead, ask her out. Go ahead. You can do it."

He starts to walk away but then turns around and says, "How about lunch? "When?" "How about right now?" Now that's aggressive. Ruth may have thought about it for a moment. She's been working all morning long, gleaning barley. Her hair is a mess. Her clothes are dirty. She smells from the hot, dusty work. But she was hungry and Boaz was good looking and kind. So they sat down, shared bread, sour wine and he heaped on her plate some roasted grain. But you realize that this must be their first date because, even though she was hungry, she really couldn't eat it all. She was so caught up in the moment wondering, "What's going on here?" Do you remember that feeling, that first date moment when you are so excited that you can't even eat?

I bet she thought about it the rest of the afternoon. I bet she didn't even notice that she was gleaning a lot more grain than she had in the morning. There was a reason. Boaz told his reapers, "Let her glean among some of the standing barley and when you are binding, pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean..." I want her leaving here with lots of grain.

And she did. At the end of the day, she beat out what she had gleaned and it was about an ephah of barley, the equivalent of 26 pounds! She comes lugging the grain home and Naomi is shocked. She's never seen such a glean. "Where did you get all of that grain?" She says, "Well, as it happened I picked this field and there was lots of grain and a nice man named Boaz who said nice things and gave me lunch." Naomi stops her and says, "Hold on. Say that again." "As it happened, I picked this field..." "No, no. The name of the man." "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz." (Ruth 2:19c) "Boaz?" Suddenly, the lightbulb goes on in Naomi's head and she says, "Blessed be he by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!...The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin." (Ruth 2:20) As it happened? This didn't just happen. God's all over this. God's not done with us yet. God's loving-kindness is steadfast and enduring. God's brought us Boaz. You've got to stay close to him."

And she does. Or at least she tries to. Ruth continued to glean in Boaz's field right up to "the end of the barley and the wheat harvests," as long as six or seven weeks, but nothing happens. Boaz may have appeared very anxious to have some sort of relationship with Ruth in the beginning but he retreats into silence. What's up with that? There are no chocolates, flowers, no phone calls, text messages or spontaneous lunches in the field. We are so excited to see it work out, we're tempted to jump ahead to the end of the

book because we know how it's going to end; we can just feel it. But don't do it. Timing is everything and as it so happens, God is working on something big, far bigger than just lunch in a field. It takes time to unfold and it will around the feast of weeks.

As it happens, the festival celebrating the harvest is big because there is lots of grain because there had been rain. And when there is grain, there is bread in the house of bread. But spoiler alert, it won't be the only thing in the house of bread.

¹ Gaiser, F. J., Lewis, K. M., Lange, D. G., Jacobson, R. A., & Schifferdecker, K. M. (2013). A new look at sermon series: preaching through Ruth. *Word & World*, 33(2), 166-187.

² King, G. A. (1998). Ruth 2:1-13. *Interpretation*, 52(2), 182-184.