

“Blessings in the Boundaries” Pt 2

Living Wisely in An Unwise World

Ruth 1:1-9

Pastor Jeff Stivason

December 1, 2017

Jeff: Why don't we pray this morning? Our heavenly Father, we do thank You and praise You. You are God and there is no other. And You've revealed Yourself so powerfully in the Scriptures that we are humbled by what we read. But it's not just an overwhelming power that dominates. It's also a power that enfolds. And we are embraced by what You have written through Your Holy Spirit, through agents. Father, we are so thankful that when we were yet sinners, who deserved the domination of an almighty Power in judgment, You sent Your beloved Son that we might have life in His name. When we were unlovable, You loved us. And You sent Your Son to die on the cross on our behalf. Father, we are so thankful for this. And the power that was exercised on our behalf now humbles us and causes us great joy at the same time. And so when we look upon You, when we think about You, we think about You as Father and mighty King. And we know that we are embraced by Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit.

And so, Father, we thank You for the opportunity to gather before You and hear more from Your word. For we know that this is the safe place to stand. This is the place where You have guided us so that we might learn.

And Father, we come before You today asking that You would teach us. But Father, we also pause to pray for Sandy and ask that Your hand would be upon her, especially as she has such fast-growing cancer. We know, Lord, that Your power is mighty and that You are able to dominate this and to subdue it, and even to remove it from her body. And so we pray that You would do that. And yet we also know that according to Your will You have Your own plans. And so we pray most of all that we would be submissive to You. But yet, Father, we pray that Sandy and her family would learn through this whole situation. And yet You've asked us to express our will. And ours is for healing.

Father, we also come before You, giving You thanks for Bruce and for the good reports that we're hearing about him, of him being up and about and able to drive, and for the doctors and for the way in which they're talking about the future for him. Father, we pray that that would continue in leaps and bounds. And Father, we pray that You'll encourage Bruce's heart as he is apart from us.

Father, we ask now that You will bless us and strengthen us by Your grace for the work we have to do this morning. And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Jeff: Turn the mike on.

Participant: I can't do everything. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Okay. So I want you to know something. I want you to know that last week we had a really slim week. And I want you to know that I was concerned about it. I thought it was because we were studying the book of Ruth. And Sig said to me, "No, no, no. These guys all go Black Friday shopping." *(Laughter)* Yes he did, he did.

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But I wanted to help you. I wanted to give you a visual, okay?

Transcriber’s Note: A bearded man.

Jeff: Manly men study Ruth.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: Yes, that’s all I’m saying. All right. So we didn’t get very far last week. We got into a lot of discussion. There’s a little bit of a change from last week to this week. But we’re staying with the same three points. We need to *know the boundaries*. We need to *know the One who establishes the boundaries*. And we need to *choose to live within the boundaries*.

What we’ve been talking about is Ruth 1:1-9. And we’re going to look at the entire book of Ruth through a particular lens. We’re not going to go through the book of Ruth just sort of unfolding the story. We are going to do that. But one of the things that we’re going to do as we look at the book of Ruth is to look at it from a particular angle.

Actually, we’re going to look at it from three different angles. But all of them converge. We’re going to look at *the sovereignty of God* in the book of Ruth. We’re going to look at *decision making* in the book of Ruth. And we’re going to look at *prayer as a means of grace* in the book of Ruth. And you capture all of those by talking about decision making. So I’m going to talk about that in a predominant way, especially today. But we’re going to be talking about that theme as we move through the book of Ruth.

So I think there are some very important lessons for all of us, and not just for us. For instance, you may think, well, the important decisions of my life are made. I have a job. I know who I’m married to. I’ve been to college already, and however many other things you can add to that list. But you have people all around you who are making decisions, and you still make decisions. And so we’re going to think about Ruth. And we’re going to think about it in the context of decision making.

Well I’m going to read to you the first nine verses this morning. So let me do that now. Actually, can I get somebody else to read that? Does somebody else with a good strong voice want to read that? Yes, Mike. Go ahead.

Mike: *“In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man’s name was Elimelech. The wife’s name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.*

“Now Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. And they had lived there about ten years. But Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.” To verse 9?

Jeff: Yes, please.

Mike: *“When Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of His people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law, and they prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.*

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“Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the LORD show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead relatives and to me. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.’”

Jeff: All right. Thank you very much. When we talk about the will of God, or discerning the will of God, practically speaking we’re talking about decision making. And when we talk about decision making, there are often two approaches that one may take.

First of all, one may take *the bull’s-eye approach* to decision making. In other words, you’ve heard it said that if I have a choice between Sandy and Susie, and I don’t know who I’m supposed to marry, the person may say to me, “This is a very important choice, because if you marry the wrong girl, you may not be in the will of God.”

And you’ve heard people talk like this. I’ve heard people talk like this. Or people will say things like this. They’ll say, “You know, I think I can trace it all the way back to when I first got married. I married the wrong girl. And I’ve been living outside of the will of God for how many years! You know, everything is going wrong because I made the wrong decision all the way back then!” And really, that’s how people have thought about decision making, hitting the bull’s-eye in everything that you do.

And let me tell you a little bit about what’s involved in that. When you think about hitting the bull’s-eye, what you are trying to do is discern the secret will of God over against reading and knowing the revealed will of God. Now let me just pause and talk to you about that for just a minute.

When we think about the secret will of God, one of the things that we need to remember is that God is infinite, but we are finite. And you know that Reformed phrase. That Reformed phrase is that *the finite cannot contain the infinite*. Now that’s not just a Reformed phrase. That’s a Biblical idea. And that Biblical idea means that my puny mind cannot fathom what is in the mind of God.

It’s not just a matter of I can’t make all of the logical deductions that will get me to where God is. It means that there is a qualitative difference between God’s thinking and my thinking. And so theologians in the 17th century came up with a way.

You know, categories help us. They may not always explain what it is that we’re thinking. But they certainly demarcate and describe how we’re trying to say what it is that we’re thinking.

And so the theologians of the 17th century came up with a couple of words to try to help us. They talk about *arche* and *eche*—*archetype* and *echetype* knowledge.

They said that archetype knowledge is God’s knowledge of Himself. Echetype knowledge is knowledge from—that’s the Greek preposition *ech*—from the archetype. But the echetype knowledge that I have is accommodated to my finiteness, because I can’t contain the infinite in my thinking. So I have a revealed or accommodated knowledge. My knowledge is different from God’s knowledge. It’s most necessarily so.

Now keeping that in mind, I know that methodologically in God’s thought I can’t ever attain that. But I also know that there are some secret things in the will of God that He’s going to reveal that are off limits to me until He reveals them.

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For instance, my 12-year-old daughter—who she’s going to marry, if she’s going to marry. What’s going to be her life at 18, 24, whatever? All of those things are in the secret will of God and they are off limits to me.

Now I know a man who I used to work with. And he was a Christian, or at least he was a professing Christian. Let me tell you what he used to do. He used to go to tarot card readers in order to discern God’s will in the future.

Men: Sighs.

Jeff: And I would say to him, “Listen to me. Do you not know that that is off limits to you? That’s part of the secret will of God. God has said that’s off limits to you. In the Old Testament he said it, and by implication in the New. You can’t do that.”

And he said, “Yes, but it’s too much of a temptation, Jeff. I’ve got to go do it.”

I said, “I want to tell you something. Sin is always a temptation!” (*Laughter*) “What are you doing, you know?”

Anyway, my point is that we always have the desire to know the secret things. But we’re not going to know the secret will of God until it’s revealed.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: And for instance, I’m not going to know who I’m going to marry until I make that decision to marry. And guess what? The moment I say “I do,” guess what? I’ve just had the secret will of God revealed to me about who I was going to marry.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: And let me tell you something. That means that I’d better have a right view of decision making before I say “I do.” And that right view of decision making is not trying to find the bull’s-eye by setting up all kinds of providential tests. I’m going to marry Susie if the phone rings twice. I’m going to marry Sandy if this happens. No! We need to have a wise view of decision making, a view of decision making that will not just encompass the big decisions—who I’m going to marry, where I go to school, where I’m going to work—but what am I going to eat in the morning, right? We need to be wise, using Biblical principles to inform us about everyday decisions, because you know what Paul says. Whether I eat or drink or sleep, I do all to the glory of God. So we need that kind of decision making. Go ahead.

Participant: Before we all run out to psychics, was the tarot card reader accurate? (*Laughter*)

Jeff: You know what? I don’t think so. (*Laughter*) I don’t remember whether or not—yeah.

Participant: I think you’ve sort of opened the door a little crack to say, “Hey, there is a way to find out the unknown will of God. I’m scared that I might have to go talk to—

Jeff: Yes. I don’t remember. Maybe I just blanked that out.

Participant: I mean the issue for the fellow was not wanting to learn the future, but control.

Jeff: That’s right.

Participant: He wanted to have control. Forget tarot card readers. We all are in control a lot, in very godly ways.

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Jeff: Yes, right.

Participant: Quote, end quote.

Jeff: Oh, that’s exactly right. We want the control and we want to put it in the most pious terms possible. You’re right.

Well then there is this kind of decision making. And this kind of decision making is *the boundary idea*. And what I mean by that is that I mean that God has established boundaries, and I need to live within those boundaries. For instance, when we think about marriage, we think about some of the things that God has revealed. He’s revealed that I’m to marry a Christian. That’s one of the boundaries. He said that you’re to honor your mother and father. And so one of the boundaries is that my kids look to me for help in discerning who it is they’re going to marry. That’s another boundary. Another boundary is that if a man doesn’t work, he doesn’t eat. So when I ask a man who is interested in my daughter about himself, the first thing I’m going to ask is where do you work, because I want my daughter to eat, right? So that’s another boundary.

These are all boundaries that help me to make a decision. But let’s say that I’ve got a couple of boys who are interested in my daughter. Let’s say that she has a couple of boys interested in her. She has to make a decision. But once we determine the boundaries, she’s free to make a wise decision.

Now what happens if she basically says a year into her marriage, “Dad, I think I made an unwise decision?” You know what my response to her is going to be. “Well, make that less wise decision into a more wise decision. You have the power to do that. You didn’t miss the will of God. You may have chosen less wisely than you could have. But now it’s time to make that less wise decision a wiser decision.”

Let me give you a couple of ideas of what we’re talking about here. In the Scriptures, we often talk about—well, we don’t often talk about it in the Scriptures, although it is in the Scriptures—we often talk about things like this, open doors or closed doors. We’re really using those. When people use those phrases, they’re oftentimes using the bull’s-eye mentality. But those are phrases that capture the wisdom view, living within the boundaries.

Now let me tell you what I mean by that. Let me tell you how somebody uses an open door or closed door with regard to the bull’s-eye.

When I was living in northwestern PA, I was driving once a week down to Philadelphia for classes for my Ph.D. In the midst of a 12-week semester I ran into two days where I was just literally beaten with a snowstorm. It took me eight to ten hours to get home on both occasions. I had a lady come up to me in my congregation and she said this to me. She said, “I think the Lord is trying to tell you something.”

I said, “What do you think He’s trying to tell me?” (*Laughter*)

She said, “I think He’s trying to tell you that He doesn’t want you to go to school over in Philadelphia.”

And I said, “Well when I put those two days in the scale panel with the ten nice days that I had for driving, what do I do with that? It looks to me like I’ve got to vote yes. He does want me to go.”

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Let me just tell you something. When you’re talking about open doors and closed doors, we’re talking within the boundaries framework.

Let me give you two instances. This is in 1 Corinthians 16:8. Paul says, *But I will stay at Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*” In other words, if the lady in my congregation were with Paul, she’d go up to him and she’d say, “Now listen. I know this is a great opportunity. But I think the Lord is trying to tell you something,” right? Okay, all right. *(Laughter)*

Then I want you to look at 2 Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 12. *“When I came to Troas to preach the gospel, even though a door was open before me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.”*

Now there are people who would say, “Whoa, Paul passed up an open door for ministry! Is he crazy?” No, he was just exercising wisdom. He was living within the boundaries. There’s no place in Scripture that says, “You must stay in Troas and preach the gospel there!” You know, that sort of thing. He realized there was an open door for him to preach in Troas and he decided that wisdom, the wise decision, was for him not to stay. Why? Because there were other pressing priorities.

All of these things help us to understand that, for instance, we have to live according to some priorities in our lives. And those priorities are not things that we’re necessarily going to talk about at this point. But you get the idea.

So I wanted to basically create for you a context in thinking about the book of Ruth. We’re going to be thinking about the book of Ruth in terms of a *boundaries* kind of way, okay? So I want us to think about the boundaries with regard to Ruth and what happens with her.

But I want you to think about a couple of things before we do that. The wisdom approach is in the Scriptures. And when you find a verse like this, *“Therefore, when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone.*

“We thought it best.” Now that’s not a statement of God’s revelation to Paul. That’s a wisdom statement. He’s trying to—

Transcriber’s Note: A cell phone rings.

Jeff: You know, life should be set to music, but I could do a little better than that, don’t you think? *(Laughter)* So *“we thought it best,”* okay?

Now here’s another one. Philippians 2:25-26. *“But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus.”* It doesn’t say, “God told us to send Epaphroditus back to you.” No, Paul thought it was necessary. He thought it best to do that.

So we need to think about those kinds of things when we think about Ruth. There’s a time of famine in the land. Now you know the story. Naomi and her husband Elimelech take their boys and they leave Bethlehem and they go down to the land of Moab.

Now here’s a live, decision making question. The question is this. What should they have done? Well they should have asked themselves, are there any boundaries that we can follow in this situation to make a decision?

Now I’m going to talk to you about the boundaries in just a second. But when we think about that question, we also ought to think about some other things. What might

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they have done? What might they have done if they determined that there were no boundaries for them to follow?

Well, for instance, I think one of the things that they could have done—and maybe they did it; we don’t know it. But one of the things they could have done was that they could have gone to the elders. They could have talked to the elders and said, “Look! There’s a famine in the land. And we don’t have the means to sustain ourselves in the land at this point. And we are a little concerned about what we ought to do.”

Now what might have been the problem with doing that?

Participant: They would have been biased.

Jeff: Okay.

Participant: We couldn’t hear you back here.

Jeff: They might have been biased. How about this one? It was during the time of the Judges. And everyone in Israel was doing what was right in their own eyes at that time. Maybe they didn’t have confidence in the leadership at that time to go to them.

Now whether that’s right or wrong,—and I just want to leave it off the table for right now,—but you know, this is kind of an interesting exercise, to think about what they might have done in that situation.

But what I want us to return to now are the boundaries themselves. What were some of the boundaries? Well this may be a boundary. The Lord said in Deuteronomy 23 that *“no Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD.”*

.Now we ought to think about that. When you read that statement, that statement taken literally is that they shall not come up here and enter our assembly. It doesn’t literally say that you shall not go into the land of the Moabites, right? But I think it’s something you might want to think about, right?

How about this one? Moab resisted Israel during the Exodus. One of the reasons why we have the number one is because when the Israelites were going through the Exodus Moab said, “No, no, no, no, no! You are not going to go through our land.”

“Oh, okay. So you’re not going to come into our assembly,” says the LORD. So there is hostility toward the Israelites on the part of the Moabites. That could be a second boundary.

And this one is even worse! The Moabite women seduced Israelite men, leading them away from the Lord. Remember this? Who was the prophet?

Participant: Balaam.

Jeff: Remember Balaam? Balaam says, “Man! I cannot curse them!” Curses, you know, that sort of thing. And he says, “I’ve got a better idea. Get your women to seduce their men, and that will introduce syncretism into their community. And it will destroy them.” And remember, that’s what they do.

Now these are boundaries. These are boundaries that are, I think, important for us to think about when we think about what Naomi has done. When we think about them, I think we need to understand that this is what’s on Naomi’s mind when she returns, and her attitude.

So do these constitute a boundary that says, “Don’t go down to Moab?” I’m interested in what you have to say. Do you think that these constitute a clear-cut boundary that says

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don't go down to Moab? Or do you think that a wise person would look at these and say, “Well they don't really constitute a boundary that says don't go down to Moab. But they certainly indicate that this may not be a wise thing. And it may be a sinful thing.” Where are you on that?

Participant: Going back to the future, after the Exodus, how did God identify the land? It was the land flowing with milk and honey that He would provide, first and foremost. And that was the greatest boundary.

Jeff: Okay. But what if somebody pushes back on you and says, “But Abraham went to Egypt, but—

Participant: That was a mistake.

Jeff: But he was blessed.

Participant: He was blessed, but he made a big mistake. He almost lost everything. But God dealt with Pharaoh and shook him up pretty good, and gave him a bad dream one night. And so, because God chooses Abram and Sarai out of Egypt and Pharaoh, oh boy! That was part of it. One way or another, Abraham was going to be blessed and become extremely wealthy.

Jeff: Well, that's true.

Participant: God used that situation. So you can't use that as an excuse. Well he sinned, and I'll sin.

Jeff: Absolutely not. But you have to ask yourself. Was there a boundary for Abram? And if the boundary for Abram was I'm giving you this land flowing with milk and honey, and Abram said, “Well I don't really possess this land yet, and there's a famine in the land I'm going to be given that I don't yet possess,” and he goes down to Egypt, and he does get blessed down there with riches, he brings back a whore named Hagar, right?

Participant: Right.

Jeff: You know, there's a little bit of ambiguity there. Is there that kind of ambiguity here? I mean I would say that your argument works better for Naomi, because they do possess the land. This is later Abram inherits the land through his posterity. They possess the land now. And one of the reasons why there's a famine in it is because the people are sinning. Maybe one of the things that they could have done is to go to the elders and say, “We need to call a day of fasting and repentance, because we're in this situation because we've sinned, and we're experiencing the curses of the covenant.”

With Abraham and in this particular case there's that one key word that flows all the way through the Bible: *believe*. You've got to believe God. You've got to believe men. You've got to believe yourself. We know in this room that if we believe in ourselves, we're fools.

Jeff: Yes. Absolutely. Okay, yes?

Participant: The more I keep thinking about it, I guess we don't know the decisions, when we make them. We just pick the decision we think is wise.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: But you just kind of have to have faith after that point, right? You can't really second guess yourself.

Jeff: Once you make a decision that is a binding decision like marriage,--

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Participant: You’ve just got to go with it at that point.

Jeff: You can’t go back and say to yourself, “Man, I wish!”

Participant: You would second guess on everything. Should I paint the car with a blue color or red?

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: That sort of thing isn’t that big of a deal, but—

Jeff: Well let’s say that your wife talks you into a pink car. You thought it was a good idea at the time, right?

Participant: No way! *(A chuckle)*

Jeff: and, you know, you come to the Brave Men Bible study in a pink car. *(Laughter)* These guys are merciless to you. You may think that it’s worth it. You may think, “I’m going to do the less wise thing and go \$10,000 more in the hole and get a black car.” Right?

Participant: Right.

Jeff: Now you may think that’s a less wise decision. But in the long run it will prove to be more wise. Then you come to the Bible study in a black car and they say, “Where did your pink car go? We loved that pink car. We were just messing with you.” Right? You know how guys are, right? *(Laughter)* “We didn’t really mean it,” you know? Yes?

Participant: This makes me think here, and maybe you’re going with this. I know in my own life that is even how I explain things to my children. That’s faith. Once you make a decision, you just have to pull through it and sometimes not understand as you go through it. But know that it’s going to work out the way that God wants.

Jeff: Yes, that’s right.

Participant: I’m a little confused here. Are you talking about Naomi’s decision to go back home?

Jeff: Well we’re talking about Naomi and Elimelech’s decision to initially go down, to go to Moab. We’re going to come to their decision about sending them home.

Participant: When you’re setting up the scenario about coming to the elders and making a decision, Moses set up the elders of his time.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: The period of the Judges was really rough.

Jeff: Yes. That’s right.

Participant: They might not have had any elders.

Jeff: That’s right.

Participant: Except Saul.

Jeff: And if they did, maybe it was rough.

Participant: There’s a parallel in the churches today. A recent survey showed that a large amount of people belong to different kinds of churches. Some of them don’t have a Biblical form of church government, like elders to go to.

Jeff: Okay.

Participant: I mean, it seems like a lot of these issues revolve around the issue of do we trust in God’s sovereignty?

Jeff: Yes.

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Participant: I mean we make a decision and afterwards we say, “Well after that we have to have faith.” Well, faith in what? That God is sovereign and He has the final say.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: I make lousy decisions all the time.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: I was meeting with a client the other day. I sounded off to a client because I ran out of patience with him. And I said that the conversation was over. Then I hung up on her. I don’t often do that. So that was not a good decision. It’s not easy. We just do it all the time. So it seems like in evangelicalism that there are almost like two thoughts. There’s a thought that if we just drill down on the Scriptures deeply enough, we can be pretty certain of making the right decisions all the time.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: and there’s another one that says—and I think that as an Anglican I count myself as part of this—that there’s a lot more ambiguity.

Participant: Yes.

Participant: I mean, I—

Jeff: Yes. And I think there is ambiguity, and I think you’re going to see it here.

Participant: And it’s due to my sinful nature.

Jeff: Well yes. I think it’s due to our sinful nature. But I think that what we see in this story is due to our sinful nature. But let me go on. Let’s think about the boundary Maker for a minute. Oh, Carl?

Carl: I just wanted to add to that. I believe that, as Bill was saying, that this is the same thing with the final judgment. As you said earlier, people were kind of doing their own thing. And so since they were kind of doing their own thing, here’s a man who has a family and is hungry.

Jeff: Yes.

Carl: And so there’s a famine in the land. And maybe there weren’t any elders that you could go to.

Jeff: Yes.

Carl: And so with that a man is going to do what he has to do to feed his family.

Jeff: Yes.

Carl: And so with that he decided, okay, maybe there’s food in Moab, you know? It’s kind of like when Jacob said to his family, “Go down to Egypt and see if there’s food there.”

Jeff: That’s right.

Carl: And you’ve got to remember that God is always in His glory. His sovereignty is always in play.

Jeff: Right. Here’s the thing, though. And I know you know this. And that is that His sovereignty is always in play, but so is my responsibility.

Carl: Without a doubt.

Jeff: Right. And so it’s incumbent upon me to discern those boundaries. And I think, for instance, if you look at Naomi, Naomi goes down to Moab. What is it that brings

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Naomi back to Bethlehem? It is that she hears that there is bread in the bread basket. In the House of Bread, there’s bread again.

So there’s an interesting dynamic at work here. And we’re going to be exploring this dynamic of repentance. In other words, let me just put it crassly. Is she really repentant? Has she really turned wholeheartedly and said, “What I’ve done is sin”? Or has she been opportunistic again and said, “Just like there was food in Moab and I went to Moab, now there is food in Bethlehem, and I’m going to Bethlehem”? Yes?

Participant: I’m wondering. It says that there was a man. If it was really Elimelech’s decision, then maybe she went along with him in obedience. Not wholeheartedly, necessarily. We don’t know.

Jeff: And that’s true.

Participant: It’s sort of on him. And God preserves her because she—

Jeff: But the question is couldn’t she have returned earlier, because it seems like Elimelech is dead and then the two sons have to die. It seems like she remains in Moab longer than Elimelech’s death. At least that’s kind of the way it’s presented.

Participant: But even if you believe that God will provide, He’s not going to tell you whether He’ll provide in one place or the other.

Jeff: Yes, that’s right, because you could go down to this land of plenty and still not—

Participant: He will still provide.

Jeff: That’s right.

Participant: (*unclear*)

Jeff: Let me jump to this third point, because I think this is going to set us up for the rest of the book.

Transcriber’s Note: Jeff draws a cartoon.

Jeff: Oh yes, there’s Snoopy. You choose the boundaries, right? You’ve got to choose the boundaries. I want you to get your Bibles out. Look back and go to Ruth. And I want you to notice that you have several things at work here. You have Naomi, and she says, “I’m leaving for Bethlehem, the House of Bread.” She takes her daughters-in-law to the edge, to the borders of Moab. And then in verse 8 she says, *Go return, each of you, to your mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with me with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you, in the house of your husband. Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.*”

Now here’s what I want you to see. I want you to see that she prays for them. This is a well wish. “May the LORD bless you.” She is asking for the Lord’s blessing to be upon these girls.

Now I want you to notice. She’s asking for the Lord’s blessing to be upon them in the land of Moab because that’s where she’s asking them to go. “Go back to the land of Moab.”

Now I want you to notice three prayer requests that are going to form the structure for the entire book. First, notice this. *Naomi prays for loving-kindness*. This is that huge word in the Old Testament, *chesed*, the loving-kindness, the covenant faithfulness of the Lord. It’s translated in numerous ways. But it is always meant to indicate the Lord’s faithfulness to His covenant. It’s in the Psalms, it’s in the Writings, it’s everywhere. And

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when it’s used in relation to God’s covenant, it always talks about His faithfulness to His covenant.

So in this prayer she’s asking that God be covenantally faithful to these girls, by the way, in the land of Moab. That’s the first thing.

And then she asks that they experience rest in the land of Moab. Now you will find that the Psalms use this word *rest* as a synonym for the land of promise. In other words, the land of rest is the Promised Land. And I’ll show you that as we go along.

My point is that she is using covenantal language in her prayer for these girls, asking that God would show them the blessings of the land of promise in the land of curse, okay? And then she says, “I want the LORD to supply you with some pagan hubbies. I want you to go back to the land of Moab and I want you to have husbands and raise little pagan children.” So she’s asking for those three things for these girls.

Now I want you to see something just quickly. I said that this builds the structure for the entire book. Go with me, for instance, to chapter 2. This is where Ruth goes into the field of Boaz.

And look at what happens here. What happens is in verse 20. “*And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, ‘May he be blessed by the LORD whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead.’*” In other words, it’s not translated *loving-kindness*; it’s just translated as *kindness*. It’s the word *chesed*. In other words, the Lord has shown us *chesed*.

And she even uses the same kind of phraseology that she used to describe the girls as they showed kindness to the living and the dead. But she’s recognizing that God has shown *chesed* to us here through Boaz.

But then what does she do? Naomi’s a stinker! She really is, because look at what she does next. In chapter 3 Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, “*My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you?*” It’s the same word—*rest*. Now she’s saying and she recognizes that it was the LORD who showed loving-kindness. But now the opportunistic Naomi is coming out. And she’s going, “*Shall I not seek rest for you?*”

And then she does something utterly stupid, and we’ll talk about that the more we go on. And then in the final chapter, what do we find? We find in chapter 4 that she gets a husband—exactly the three things that Naomi prays for at the end of the book.

Now here’s what I want you to grab. What I want you to grab is that Naomi is a believer. And it appears as though she’s a believer who has sinned. She is the one who acknowledges that, and we’ll see that later. She has sinned and she’s limping along. Right now she’s full of bitterness.

And she prays somewhat aright. But her prayer is broken. And I think that the way we need to view her prayer is that it is offered up. She’s a genuine believer. It’s offered up, and it goes through Christ, the promised Messiah. And God answers it according to His faithfulness.

And you know, I always think about my prayers going up through the Savior. And they get cleaned up, right, and presented to the Father. And I think that the idea here is that she is praying for three good things in a stupid way. “Lord, answer them in Moab.”

And I think that God is saying to her, “Look, hon. You did pretty good things. But We’re going to answer them in the way and in the context that they ought to be

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answered--in the Promised Land, in the land of blessing. You watch this as I unfold this for you.”

But Naomi is still fighting against herself. In chapter 3 she’s fighting against herself. She’s wanting to answer that second petition for herself. She’s not willing to let God be sovereign and answer it. And we’ll see how that works out for her. But do you have any questions? If you don’t, I think that’s all I have.

So living wisely is living within the boundaries. And then when we don’t, God is still faithful. Okay, so let me pray. Oh, sorry.

Participant: Can you just help me understand that phrase a little better that Naomi was saying, as said to her daughter-in-law, *“May you be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead?”*

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: Is that anticipating the resurrection and their salvation? Why is she referring to the dead?

Jeff: I think that what she’s doing is referring back to her posterity. Sorry, back to her husband and children. That’s who she was referring to at the beginning of the book. And I think that’s what she’s referring to now. Here’s somebody who’s been kind to us and to our heritage, right?

Participant: Jeff, you spoke about discerning the secret will of God. I didn’t get the rest of that. You said in the beginning about hitting the bull’s-eye, discerning the secret will of God versus—

Jeff: The revealed will. And you remember Deuteronomy 29:29. The revealed things belong to us and our children, but the secret things belong to God.

Participant: Amen.

And we leave those things where they are. Okay?

All right. Let me pray. Father in heaven, thank You for this day. Again we praise You for who You are and for the way in which You work in us and through us. And Father, that means exercising wisdom. And so, Father, we pray that You’d give us wisdom for the day, in Jesus Christ who is our wisdom. And we ask it in His name. Amen.

Men: Amen. *(Applause)*