

## “The Way of Virtue”

Profiles of Faith #9: Ruth

Read Ruth 1-4

The word “virtue” comes from the Greek *arête*, which means “excellence,” and the Latin *virtus*, which means “worth.” It defines a disposition that creates passions or habits (Latin *habitus*, which means “character”) which dispose one ethically to do the right thing (Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms). People who consistently choose the way of virtue build a character that stands out in a hurting world. Biblically, God desperately wants us to choose the virtuous path (usually harder) over the way of the world (much easier, for sure). He actually rewards those who do, and is able to use their life in profoundly significant ways. Ruth was a young woman who trusted God in this, and left us an inspiring example of true character.

Last week we looked at Naomi, a woman who fought through deep disappointment, persevered, and never stopped trusting in God. Man, she must have been so inspiring to be around, which I believe is precisely why Ruth chose to leave her homeland of Moab and follow Naomi back to Bethlehem. The other daughter-in-law, Orpah, didn’t come with her. Two Moabite women, hanging around the same Naomi, and one was inspired enough to pack up and go with her! It isn’t a knock against Orpah, just probably testimony that Ruth valued different things, better things. One of the things virtuous people do is choose godly, inspiring friends to be around. I’m not very impressed any more by flashy people. As I get older, I find myself drawn to deep people. People who have suffered and not given up. People who cry a lot but refuse to be bitter. People who pray consistently, even in agony. People who stay devoted to God and His ways, despite being disappointed or hurt. People who serve in the church without any need for recognition. People who have godly “habitus,” not worldly ones. I want to be around those people because I know it will stretch me and call me higher. In the end, my character will be more excellent and of greater worth by having relationships like this. What about you? Who inspires you? Who are your closest friends? It matters.

It was clear that Ruth deeply feared God - she stayed faithfully devoted to his ways. In the end, that is all God expects of each one of us. When we do this, he can use us. Think about how he used Ruth. The book of Ruth is a foreshadowing of the redemptive story of Christ. Boaz, her husband, acted upon his duty in the Mosaic law to be “kinsman-redeemer” to his impoverished, hurting relative (Leviticus 25:47-49). This was pointing to the gospel story, in which Christ redeemed us, spiritually impoverished people who were enslaved to sin. By obeying God and staying faithful to His commands, Jesus makes us his kinsman! In fact, Ruth’s devotion to God allowed her to bear a son named Obed, the grandfather of David and ancestor of Jesus. Her obedience allowed God to put her into the lineage of Christ! God can powerfully use people when they choose the way of virtue.

Finally, we see in Ruth the very qualities that matter the most to God. Proverbs 31:10-31 talks about the “wife of noble character.” We see these qualities in Ruth. Despite hardship, she stayed devoted to her family (Prov. 31:10-12), and her trust in God shines through all she does (Prov. 31:30). In the King James version, Proverbs 31:26 says “she openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of *kindness*.” Remember her words to a dejected Naomi: “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.” No kinder words could have been uttered at that time.

Ruth’s life and speech were devoted to being used for God. She chose the way of virtue and was richly rewarded. May we strive to live a virtuous life.

