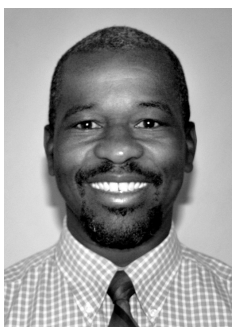


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“Matters of Life Facing Ordinary People: A Study of the Book of Ruth”

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About the Author



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MONDAY, JULY 1

RUTH 1:1-3

PROVERBS 4:20-27

*“Keep thy heart with all diligence;
for out of it are the issues of life.”*

THE TIMES OF THE JUDGES (1)

The period of the Judges presents to us a period, in the history of God’s people Israel, when the nation groped in the dark and walked without direction; and her sins separated her from her God and repeatedly caused her to fall. This period highlighted the frailty and depravity of man.

The Book of Ruth is set in the period of the Judges, presenting to us the realities and pictures of life. In its pictures, it points out the light of providence in the darkest hours of the life of God’s people. The Book presents to us matters and realities of life, matters of providence and faith amidst the uncertainties, and the difficulties of daily life. Like the Book of Judges, the Book of Ruth looks into times of emergencies; but unlike Judges, which looks at the emergencies from a national perspective, Ruth focuses on them from a personal one. Like the Book of Judges, Ruth points out God’s grace, compassion and longsuffering. But unlike the Book of Judges, which points out God’s grace compassion and longsuffering extended to the nation, Ruth points out the same, as extended to the family, and the individual.

As we seek to look at “God’s Providence in the Daily Issues of Life,” we begin by defining the meaning of “Providence.” The Westminster Confession of Faith, states: “God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose and govern all creatures, actions and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness and mercy.”

“...in the days when the Judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1a). The story of Ruth is set in the background of the period of the Judges. Personal responsibility and piety are not to be excused by the lack of righteous and godly authority and example among the people. Understanding the providence of God begets the responsibility of man in life despite circumstances.

THOUGHT: Providence requires responsible living within God’s will.

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to trust in Thy providence and plans for my life.

TUESDAY, JULY 2
RUTH 1:1-3
LEVITICUS 26:14-20

*“Your strength shall be spent
in vain: for your land
shall not yield her increase.”*

THE TIMES OF THE JUDGES (2)

What the doctrine of providence requires of man is reflected in the statement by Matthew Henry: “There is no running from God but by running to Him, no fleeing from His justice but by fleeing to His mercy.”

“...there was a famine in the land” (Ruth 1:1). This verse reflects the nation’s area of departure! They departed from their commission, they had a change of mind and purpose, and they trusted in their own wisdom and thoughts, neglecting clear instructions given by God. Circumstances, temporal advantages, and prevailing benefits reigned supreme. Their minds became their authority, and they did not follow what God’s Word said. The command to eradicate the Canaanites was one that would ensure their separateness and enhance their holiness. It had spiritual benefits; it would deliver them from the temptations posed by the Canaanite ways. They did not look at it from the spiritual perspective; they did not consider that corrupt communications corrupt good morals. They chose compromise instead of separation. There is no temporal gain that is worth the spiritual ruin that disobedience to God’s Word and will brings. Our desire must always be to know God’s Word and to walk in obedience to His revealed will.

When they departed from God’s Word and followed their minds, when they rejected God’s plan and set up a different path for themselves, their diligent and good efforts bore no fruit. The house of Bread was visited by scarcity of bread. The soil was still fertile, the land still a “good land,” but the providence of God ordained a chastening famine, which was to turn His children back to him. There was providence in the famine, just as when God *“brake the whole staff of bread”* (Ps 105:16), or during David’s reign (2 Sam 21:1; 24:13), and as embodied in Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the Temple (2 Chron 6:22-39) and repeated by Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20:6-9.

THOUGHT: Providence places each moment of life within God’s plan.

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to see Thy hand of providence and leading in my life.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 3

RUTH 1:1-3

LUKE 12:13-34

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

THE TIMES OF THE JUDGES (3)

Although providence places each moment of life within God’s plan, it does not absolve man of any of his personal responsibilities. Knowledge of providence should drive man to seek God’s will and to walk in obedience to God’s revealed Word. As the Book of Ruth opens, we are introduced to Elimelech and his family, and we see them in their quest to seek sustenance in difficult times. The famine was sore upon the land, but the people of Bethlehemjudah did not do as the Danites did in the Book of Judges. However, Elimelech and his family did leave.

“...a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn...” (Ruth 1:1). Life is filled with uncertain circumstances, but life is not to be governed by the changing times. It ought, rather, to be governed by a higher, objective, and unchanging Ruler. Elimelech looked at the hard and unfavourable circumstances that affected everyone, and decided to move his family from the Promised Land. This decision was not a national, tribal or even an extended family one. Others chose to stay through the famine as Elimelech and his immediate family left. It was famine that led Abraham to Egypt (Gen 12:10), Isaac to Gerar (Gen 26:2ff) and Jacob to Egypt. A man’s life is not directed and governed purely by his choices and decisions (though choices affect life as they come with consequences). Indeed, it is God who rules over the kingdoms of men and directs the lives of individuals.

“...And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there” (Ruth 1:2). We learn that the life of man is not measured by his status in society or his possessions. Circumstances would at a moment, without notice, reveal to us the uncertain nature of material possessions. One could go from a member of a wealthy family, to leaving all behind to live in a foreign land, as it were, “starting afresh.” Though the decision to move brought to them some temporal relief for a season, it did not shield them from the challenges and misfortunes of life. For even in Moab, Elimelech and his sons died!

THOUGHT: Though choices influence life, God remains King in life.

PRAYER: Father, help me obey Thy will amidst the changing scenes in life.

THURSDAY, JULY 4

RUTH 1:4-10

ECCLESIASTES 9:1-12

*“...time and chance happeneth
to them all.”*

PROVIDENCE, DECISIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES (1)

Ruth is a story of providence and faith, and of their place in a life filled with tragedies and uncertainties. Life has circumstances and changes that are within our control, as well as those that are beyond our control. Naomi found herself bereft of her husband and sons during their sojourn in Moab. She was left with her two daughters-in-law. Steps that were taken to secure the family did work for a while and the family enjoyed some relief. However, the uncertainty of life, and circumstances beyond their control, changed their lives. They had marriages and happiness for a season, but also a good measure of pain and sorrow by way of the funerals. With the passage of time, the women were left alone, bereft of their husbands.

Chance and circumstances sometimes force us to make certain decisions. Of these, some are: (i) temporal, in which we find ourselves limiting ourselves by time (we are getting old, or our time is passing), and place (our options are limited because there are no godly or mature men or women around here). We end up making decisions hurriedly and unadvisedly. Others are (ii) subjective, in which we find ourselves limiting ourselves by standards we set for ourselves and measuring ourselves by those we choose to. Some may say that due to their circumstances, Naomi's sons could not but marry Moabitesses. They use Ruth as a case in point, and conclude that it does not matter who you marry, for some “unbelievers” have better characters than some “believers.”

We often emphasise what we see and feel, and forget to consider what we believe and what God says when making choices. We measure the value of our choices based on their temporal outcome rather than on spiritual principles and divine instructions. The stories of love and life become tragedies of life, yet there is room for making new choices that are not based on temporal or subjective principles but rather on objective and spiritual principles. The changes in life brought about changes in perspectives and choice patterns for Naomi and Ruth.

THOUGHT: Death reminds us of our frailty (Ps 103:13-18).

PRAYER: (Read Nehemiah 9:32-38.)

FRIDAY, JULY 5
RUTH 1:4-10
1 SAMUEL 22:1-4

*“And they said unto her,
Surely we will return
with thee unto thy people.”*

PROVIDENCE, DECISIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES (2)

The news of the end of the famine and the visitation of God reached Naomi; it found her with no stake in Moab. The news she received was to her the call of providence beckoning her home, for the reason they had left and stayed away all these years was now no more as the famine had ended.

“Then she arose... that she might return... for she had heard...” (Ruth 1:6). The verbs are all in the singular, indicating personal actions. Naomi took the initiative to return home. Though she had dwelt long in the land of Moab, she was still concerned with the Land of Promise for *“she had heard.”* As Nehemiah at the king’s court was concerned with news from Judah, and received word from those who returned, Naomi was also concerned with Bethlehem and received word about the workings of providence there. The famine that had driven them away had ended and the Almighty had visited the House of Bread, blessing it with bread.

“And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law...” (Ruth 1:8). The decision to move back was here informed by the news of God’s presence and providence in Bethlehem. Her motive for her decision was clear. But what about her daughters-in-law? Why were they accompanying her on her journey back? As the three women walked, Naomi turned to Ruth and Orpah, and the dialogue addressed the issue of motives in decision-making. With a blessing, Naomi told them to leave her and to return to their mothers’ homes, showing that her decision was a personal one and she did not intend by the decision to involve them in a change of country. This was a call for them to examine personal reasons apart from filial loyalty for accompanying her. She told them to leave her and return home, so they had to have a reason to accompany her back to Bethlehem. However, they chose to cling to and go with her, possibly motivated by duty and love (Ruth 1:10).

THOUGHT: “Love is the only state of mind from which all the only other duties that you owe them, can arise.” (John Angell James)

PRAYER: (Read Psalm 108.)

SATURDAY, JULY 6
RUTH 1:11-18
JOB 5:8-18

“...he maketh sore, and
bindeth up: he woundeth,
and his hands make whole.”

PROVIDENCE, DECISIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES (3)

Life in general is filled with uncertainties, and most of life's decisions come with some level of unpredictability. Naomi had made her decision, though she did not know the details of what awaited her in Bethlehem. She would not commit her daughters-in-law to the uncertainties of her life, so she turned to them to review their decision to accompany her.

“...why will ye go with me?...” (Ruth 1:11). Decisions in life require reason. Naomi had found her reasons in her faith, as she had heard that God had visited His people in giving them bread. What about her two daughters-in-law? Where were they drawing their reasons from? There had to be motives other than just duty. What did they hope to gain? She had absolved them of guilt as they had dealt well with her and with the dead. She made it clear that she had nothing to offer them (Ruth 1:11-13). They would have no temporal gain (Ruth 1:11) in accompanying her, and they would temporally “lose their lives” (Ruth 1:13) by accompanying her.

“...return thou after thy sister in law” (Ruth 1:15). Orpah departed as Naomi presented no opportunity for a fresh start and no opportunity for a life in her own “husband's” home. Ruth claved to Naomi still. Naomi required of Ruth a reason. Why would she remain? Ruth in her response showed that she found and drew her reason from faith. Ruth's decision was governed by faith and not based solely on temporal reason. She did not accompany Naomi for convenience or for what she would gain, and so she was not deterred by what she might lose. Ruth looked beyond the uncertainties of life. She looked beyond the temporal, she looked up, she looked to the eternal. She claved to Naomi, and to Naomi's God. Though the outward workings of providence (“*the hand of the LORD,*” Ruth 1:13) seemed to work against Naomi, Ruth still chose to cleave to both Naomi and her God. Her answer showed both devotion and determination to leave her people and her gods, and to embrace Naomi's people and God.

THOUGHT: (Read Deuteronomy 32:39.)

PRAYER: Grant, O Father, that through the trials and changes in my life, I may trust in Thy will for my life, and walk more by faith and less by sight.

LORD'S DAY, JULY 7

RUTH 1:11-18

LUKE 9:57-62

*"Then said Jesus unto the twelve,
Will ye also go away?"*

PROVIDENCE, DECISIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES (4)

Naomi's appeal to the example of Orpah was met by a pledge of commitment and faithfulness from Ruth. Ruth's decision was not governed by temporal reason. It was also not subject to the influence either of the words of Naomi or the example of Orpah.

"...Intreat me not to leave thee..." (Ruth 1:16). Ruth's plea was made after arguments had been given and reason appealed to, and after examples were cited and she had been urged to follow it. Her plea presented her wish and heart's desire. It was a desire that showed us that in the decisions of life, though reason and the mind may be appealed to, though common practice may be cited, though temporal welfare considered, and future outcomes and profit taken into account, the spiritual wellbeing and eternal value of the decisions must be the motive that drives and informs our choices. Like the disciples of Christ, when faced with difficult choices, we must consider, not only temporary relief and comfort, but rather put more weight on eternal and spiritual felicity. Like them, our deciding factor must be: *"Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God"* (John 6:68-69).

"...she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her..." (Ruth 1:18). In this we ought to consider the testimony of Naomi's life! Ruth committed herself to Naomi and Naomi's God till death, and by an oath, called down upon herself God's wrath and judgment if she failed to keep her vow. Many who are married and introduced to a different faith by marriage tend to retain some aspects of their former beliefs. Others even actively try to influence and bring their faith with them into their new home. This is why the biblical command and principle is that of Biblical Separation. But from Ruth's statement of commitment, it is hard not to ponder on what example Naomi had set through the circumstances of life that informed and influenced Ruth's choice!

THOUGHT: Do the things that happen to me further the Gospel?

PRAYER: Father, keep me near the cross, and make Thyself known through all circumstances in my life.

MONDAY, JULY 8

RUTH 1:19-22

JOB 2:9-13

“...shall we receive good
at the hand of God, and
shall we not receive evil?”

PROVIDENCE, DECISIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES (5)

A quiet and peaceful journey seemingly followed the decision and resolve made. Since the matter was now laid to rest, the journey continued, and the arrival at Bethlehem anticipated with all its uncertainties. The silence of the journey gave way to expressions upon arrival that painted a picture of the hard knocks of life and their effects. The expressions of the pain and bitterness seen in life were translated into words by Naomi.

“...Call me not Naomi, call me Mara...” (Ruth 1:20). After many years away, probably with no news or contact, the arrival of Naomi caused a stir, and no doubt would have, especially so due to the nature of her arrival. The years and experiences were summarised by Naomi in a statement. The statement proclaimed the change that was probably visible to the women of Bethlehem and was causing a stir and feeding their “talks” in town. That change was, in Naomi’s words, one from pleasantness to bitterness. Naomi attributed the turn in her life not to chance, or to the gods of Moab where they had sojourned for a considerable amount of time, but, rather, solely to the providential hand of God. Indeed, providence affirms the hand of God in all circumstances of life. And as Job pointed out, those who trust and believe in God ought to receive all that God ordains or permits them to go through.

“I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty...” (Ruth 1:21). What lesson can we learn here? Does not the prodigal son’s flight and return come to mind? Does not the LORD use the bitterness of life to awaken and stir our hearts and minds to our need to return home? Is there not a welcome for us upon return, though we may come empty and filthy? Should we not be quick in paying attention to the chastening hand of providence, knowing that we are loved and it is the LORD who brings us home to Himself, albeit we may return empty and wasted?

THOUGHT: (Read Hebrews 12:7, 11.)

PRAYER: Grant me grace to speedily return when I stray from Thee, O Father.

TUESDAY, JULY 9

RUTH 1:19-22

LAMENTATIONS 3:19-32

*“But though he cause grief,
yet will he have compassion...”*

PROVIDENCE, DECISIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES (6)

“The Lord’s chastising rod is a ‘sugarcane.’” Providence covers not only events, actions, and circumstances, but also their timings. The LORD chastises to restore and to revive, not to destroy or to cast off. Therefore, from whence the pain is drawn, thence also the joy arises.

“...they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest” (Ruth 1:22).

The narrative and events of Ruth chapter 1 conclude by a reference to time. The twists and turns in life all happen within the constraints of time and the God who orders them ordains their timings too. Things may happen to us unplanned and unprepared for, and sometimes, they may happen in spite of our efforts and planning, but all things work for good and at the appropriate time. Whatever steps and decisions were taken by Naomi and Ruth, it cannot be claimed that they had purposed to reach Bethlehem *“in the beginning of barley harvest.”* Yet the appropriateness of the time of their arrival is evidenced by how the rest of the account of the book unfolds. From a human perspective, it would be hard to imagine the story unfolding the same way it did had they arrived at a different time.

Providence describes God in action, His continuing activity as He governs His world. This continuing activity is carried out sovereignly, yet it does not undermine, distort, or destroy human responsibility. Rather than weaken human responsibility, it gives human responsibility impetus. This impetus is drawn from understanding that God cares about all of life and all things in life. God uses everything in life, even what seems insignificant to us, and as God works, He invites us to trust Him and work with Him in obedience to fulfil our human responsibility. The beginning of the barley harvest offered to Ruth and Naomi the perfect opportunity to experience God and see His plan unfold in the daily issues of life. They came having nothing, but were sustained by the laws of God that governed the life of Israel (Lev 19:9-10) and the providence of God that governed their steps and choices.

THOUGHT: (Read Matthew 10:29-31.)

PRAYER: (Use the lyrics of the hymn “All the Way My Saviour Leads Me.”)

WEDNESDAY, JULY 10

RUTH 2:1-4

DEUTERONOMY 15:1-11

*“For the poor shall never cease
out of the land...”*

PROVIDENCE, DECISIONS AND DAILY EFFORT

Ruth chapter 2 depicts the daily life of those whom we would consider as the “less fortunate” in Israel during the Old Testament times. Life was hard, even though they were in the Land of Promise. Though all tribes received an inheritance and all families had a portion, circumstances of life seemed to “knock down” some people and rendered them “poor” in life. The Bible talks about poverty and distinguishes the kind of poverty that a man brings upon himself by his lifestyle and conduct (Prov 13:18; 20:13; 23:21; 28:19, 22), from the kind of poverty that providence and circumstances beyond a man’s control and despite a man’s effort land him in. From Ruth chapter 1, we saw that Elimelech did all he humanly could to secure his family, but by the end of the chapter, Ruth and Naomi returned to Bethlehem alone and poor. Life does not consist of a man’s possessions and goods, and thus Jesus warns us to beware of covetousness (Luke 12:15). From the instructions given concerning the poor of the land, it is also evident that life is not governed and controlled by man’s effort alone.

The Law of God laid down clear guidelines that would provide sustenance for the poor in the land, and providence would work for them to supply the needs. These instructions governed the dealings of God’s people with respect to (i) debt and lending to the poor (Exod 22:25-27; Lev 25:25; Deut 24:12), (ii) justice (Exod 23:3-7; Lev 19:15), (iii) harvest and livelihood (Exod 23:11; Lev 19:10; 23:22), (iv) giving and sacrifice (Exod 30:15; Lev 14:21; 27:8), and (v) labour and servitude (Lev 25:39, 47; Deut 24:15). Thus when Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem with nothing, they had God’s provision available to them, providentially through the provisions of the law of God that was also the law of the land. Thus, Ruth chapter 2 presents to us human choice and responsibility within the bounds of providence despite life’s circumstances, and the lesson that providence, decisions and daily effort presents is “Self-Help with God’s Help is the Best Help.”

THOUGHT: “In faith, there is enough light for those who want to believe and enough shadows to blind those who don’t.” (Blaise Pascal)

PRAYER: Father, *“I believe, help Thou my unbelief”* (Mark 9:24).

THURSDAY, JULY 11

RUTH 2:1-4

ROMANS 8:28

“...we are his workmanship,
created in Christ Jesus...”

SELF-HELP WITH GOD’S HELP IS THE BEST HELP (1)

“God is good” is a common phrase that accompanies Christian testimony and thanksgiving. This phrase highlights one of the attributes of God. God’s attributes point to His characteristics, and they mainly point to His essence or to His person/personality. Therefore, this phrase means that God is always good. When life’s circumstances knock us down, God’s goodness is not quickly and easily seen. But God does not change. He continues to be good and His goodness can be seen and found in the dealings of providence.

“And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband’s...” (Ruth 2:1). The chapter opens with the mention of Boaz as a kinsman of Elimelech. This draws attention to God’s provisions of various forms of assistance to those who need it. A kinsman was one who took up the cause of his kindred to (i) recompense the trespass (Num 5:8), (ii) preserve the family’s inheritance (Lev 25:23-28; Num 27:11), (iii) pay the debt and redeem from servitude (Lev 25:47-50), and (iv) preserve family name and raise seed (Deut 25:5-7). As Naomi returned to Bethlehem, the circumstances of her life showed her that the hand of providence had dealt her a portion of bitterness. Her afflictions brought her back home empty, yet, the same hand of providence had made provisions for her sustenance and blessing upon her return to the Land of Promise. We are introduced to Boaz who will feature greatly in God’s work here.

God uses men to perform His work and will. The Book of Judges gives a record of men whom God used at different times. Most of them were used to fight Israel’s enemies and each was a “*mighty man of valour*” (eg. Judges 11:1). Boaz, on the other hand, was presented as “*a mighty man of wealth*” (Ruth 2:1) who was also used in God’s plan of redemption. His use was not military, but providential. He did not approach Naomi at her coming, neither did she approach him directly after her arrival, yet God moved in providential ways, His wonders to perform.

THOUGHT: (Read Matthew 10:29-31.)

PRAYER: Grant me courage, Father, from the assurance of Thy care and providence over me.

FRIDAY, JULY 12
RUTH 2:1-4
ROMANS 12:1-3

“...think soberly,
according as God hath dealt
to every man the measure of faith.”

SELF-HELP WITH GOD’S HELP IS THE BEST HELP (2)

Self-help is the employing of one’s own efforts in an attempt to address or meet one’s needs using the resources available. In the present day, a worldly, ungodly and destructive view of self-help is promoted and advocated. This view that promotes independence, even from God, focusing on one’s self and efforts and placing the power to change, and the onus for change, on the individual. It disregards God, His Word, and prayer and other means of grace availed to us. This is self-exaltation, self-hurt, self-destruction, and self-glorification. The desire to address and meet one’s needs is commendable, but the efforts employed and steps taken must be done with the understanding of the providence of God and knowledge of what man is, and with the right balance between God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility.

“And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi...” (Ruth 2:2). Two widows without anyone to provide for them would seek to provide for themselves or, as it were, to help themselves by gleaning. Thanks to the law of God and its gracious provisions, there was a “social welfare system” that made provisions for the poor of the land. This system was one that required and rewarded effort, and so Ruth offered to go and glean. As she told her mother-in-law of her intentions, she said, *“Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace.”* The depraved nature of man, made even gracious provisions of God to be at times difficult for the poor and downtrodden. Ruth, probably anticipating the difficulties that being a poor foreigner would pose in her efforts, said that she would seek out the field of one who would be gracious.

Self-help cannot be without God’s help! Setting out to do something about our situation or circumstance in life must be approached with prayer, remembering our own frailty and depravity. It must be approached with the understanding of God’s grace and mercy, and done according to His Word and will.

THOUGHT: (Read Galatians 6:3-5.)

PRAYER: Grant, O Father, Thy grace to help in my walk with Thee.

SATURDAY, JULY 13

RUTH 2:1-3

PSALM 37:3-7

*“Rest in the LORD, and
wait patiently for him...”*

SELF-HELP WITH GOD’S HELP IS THE BEST HELP (3)

God’s help to man is given through providence. God’s work in the life of man, though hidden to man’s eyes many a time, is unceasing and *“all things work together for good”* (Rom 8:28). Our response and duty, thus, has to be that of: (i) seeking to know, to align ourselves with, and to do God’s will, (ii) resting, accepting, and being satisfied with what the hand of providence and grace accords us in life, and (iii) being steadfast, submitted to, and diligent to fulfil our responsibilities as revealed in God’s infallible Word. We may not know which way we ought to go, and may doubt our minds, hearts, and efforts, but we must never doubt God’s wisdom, power, Word or providential care over us.

“...and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz...” (Ruth 2:3). This verse illustrates the providential hand of God and the help that God gave. Ruth, the Moabitess, a stranger in a foreign land, thereby resolved to follow God, knowing not which way to go, yet going out with the blessing and permission of her mother-in-law. As she went out, she sought *“in whose sight I shall find grace”* (Ruth 2:2). As she went out, she had purposed to *“go...and glean ears of corn”* according to the provisions of God for the help and sustenance of the widows and the poor of the land. Clearly aligning herself with the revealed will of God, she set out to work within the boundaries of His will. She was going forth not with a fixed mind, but with a mind that seemed to be resting on whatever comes her way as provided by the hand of providence. Providence worked with her, led her in a way she knew not, but was the good way. Providence led her to a place where she would find daily bread more than sufficient to sustain her and her mother-in-law. She went out with no one holding her hand, guiding her, *“teaching her the ropes,”* to manoeuvre and manipulate *“the ropes that moved the sails to capture wind most effectively”* and thus be placed to get ahead in life. But she went out with the best help that any man could have. She went out with God’s help in providence.

THOUGHT: Men do not control life; God’s hand works behind them.

PRAYER: O Father, help me to trust Thy unseen hand as it guides me through life’s ways that I cannot see.

LORD'S DAY, JULY 14

RUTH 2:4-7

PSALM 37:3-7

“...my flesh also shall
rest in hope.”

SELF-HELP WITH GOD'S HELP IS THE BEST HELP (4)

God's help is needed by all and is given to all men. Man needs God's help not only during a crisis. We do not captain and guide our lives when all seems well and under control, and only need God's help when the situation becomes very bad and difficult for us to fix. God's hand of providence was availed not only to Naomi and Ruth, but was also extended to Boaz.

“And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem...” (Ruth 2:4). The narrative turns to draw attention to another event: the coming and arrival of Boaz. He was earlier introduced as a wealthy kinsman of Elimelech. Here, he appeared on the scene as a good master. First, a master who took diligent consideration of his affairs and looked well to his estate. He came to see how the reapers were doing, how the work of harvesting was progressing. The diligence of Boaz was not one that was driven by necessity, for he was a mighty man of wealth. But he did not, as the foolish rich man, choose to take his ease and *“eat, drink, and be merry”* (Luke 12:19). But rather, he attended to his fields personally.

“...said unto the reapers...” (Ruth 2:4). Second, a considerate and religious master. This is seen not only in his greetings to the workers and their response to him, but also in his noticing of the gleaners in his field. How his attention turned and recognised the presence of Ruth may indicate that Boaz knew those who worked in his fields but did not recognise Ruth as one of them. The Bible has clear instructions on this in Deuteronomy 24:14-15, forbidding the exploitation of workers, and making sure that the normal terms of engagement and employment are adhered to (Lev 19:13).

The same providence that ordered the steps of Ruth that morning as she went out to seek sustenance for herself and for her mother-in-law was the same providence that ordered the steps of Boaz to look into his fields and the labourers harvesting them.

THOUGHT: Biblical principles govern life rightly and bring blessings.

PRAYER: (Read Job 31:13-14.)

MONDAY, JULY 15
RUTH 2:4-7
EPHESIANS 4:23-28

“...let him labour,
working with his hands
the thing which is good...”

SELF-HELP WITH GOD’S HELP IS THE BEST HELP (5)

God’s help does not cause man to act or live contrary to God’s revealed will. God’s provisions for the poor does not contravene His principles of work ethics. The Book of Proverbs stresses the principles of diligence and hard work (Prov 10:4; 12:24, 27; 13:4). Gleaning requires effort. Likewise, any unfortunate turn of events in life and difficult circumstances we find ourselves in do not become an excuse for laziness or a reason not to put in effort in life.

“...It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi...” (Ruth 2:6). In this answer that the servant gave to Boaz in response to his question, the fact is highlighted that though she was working in the field, she was of a different nationality. Also she was still new to the country as she had just arrived with Naomi.

“And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers...” (Ruth 2:7). Ruth’s presence in Boaz’s field was not one of intrusion, but by permission. She had requested and was granted permission. She had Naomi’s permission to go glean *“in whose sight I shall find grace,”* and she found it in the field of Boaz though Boaz himself had not yet arrived. She had received favour and was diligent; making the most of the opportunity accorded her.

“...and hath continued even from morning until now...” (Ruth 2:7). Ruth was here described and distinguished from the others by her persistence, diligence and effort. God blesses industry, and as such, those who trust and believe in Him must be industrious, sparing no effort in the opportunities they receive. She had gotten permission from Naomi to go and work, she had gotten permission from the servant in charge of the harvest to work and she focused on the work she had sought and made full use of the opportunity she had been given. One who has received grace must be careful not to abuse it or let it be in vain.

THOUGHT: Grace received must be used! (Read 1 Corinthians 15:10.)
PRAYER: Father, help me be mindful of every ounce of grace given and be diligent in every task that honours Thee and my Saviour.

TUESDAY, JULY 16

RUTH 2:8-12

PROVERBS 2:1-12

*“If ye be willing and obedient,
ye shall eat the good of the land...”*

PROVIDENCE, OBEDIENCE AND PROTECTION (1)

When we are committed to doing what is right, and do it to the best of our abilities, God guides our steps and blesses us as we obediently follow His guidance and do His will. The picture presented by the Book of Ruth in this section shows us how God’s providence works for, and with, the obedient.

Boaz’s instructions to Ruth taken in light of the times (being the period of the Judges where every man did that which was right in his own eyes) and in light of the depravity of man, show that gleaning probably posed dangers to poor and unprotected ladies. How much more dangerous then to Ruth who was a foreigner and who was new to the land, having just come back from Moab with Naomi? Life has many hidden dangers and snares that even with good intentions, commitment and diligence, one can still land oneself in trouble and danger! Obedience and associations become key to avoiding many such snares. The Bible is clear that *“evil communications corrupt good manners”* (1 Cor 15:33) and thus admonishes the young that *“if sinners entice thee, consent thou not”* (Prov 1:10). Obedience to God and His Word thus becomes our safety. In the case of Ruth, providence that brought her to the field of Boaz, and to Boaz that day, so ordered that she would be protected from many a snare and heartache. But this protection would be subjected to her obedience to the words Boaz spoke to her.

Those who seek to walk uprightly can do so only in obedience. The advice to the young as presented in the Book of Proverbs is repeatedly prefaced with the call to *“hear”* (Prov 1:8; 4:1, 10; 5:7; 8:6, 33), *“receive”* (Prov 2:1; 4:10; 8:10), *“incline thine ear”* (Prov 2:2; 4:20), and *“hearken”* (Prov 7:24; 8:32) to *“my commandments”* (Prov 2:1; 3:1; 4:4; 7:1, 2). Assurance of safety and, by extension, peace and joy are extended to those who willingly and obediently submit to the wisdom and guidance of God’s will as revealed in His Word by obedience.

THOUGHT: (Read Proverbs 1:33.)

PRAYER: Grant to me, Father, a humble heart that is yielded to obey Thy instructions at all times.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 17

RUTH 2:8-12

1 JOHN 5:1-3

“...and his commandments
are not grievous.”

PROVIDENCE, OBEDIENCE AND PROTECTION (2)

Although obedience is key to our walk with the LORD and our safety in this perverse and evil generation, many consider the commandments of God and His instructions restrictive. Boaz, as he addressed Ruth, was not being controlling and restrictive; on the contrary, he was being protective and caring of her.

“...Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence...” (Ruth 2:8).

This is an interesting statement that highlights the working of providence. Ruth left to go to the field of him *“in whose sight I shall find grace”* (Ruth 2:2), and *“her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz”* (Ruth 2:3). Then, out of care and compassion, Boaz urged her not to leave his fields. He recognised Ruth’s relation to him, though she did not. He knew the dangers of gleaning in the days when *“every man did that which was right in his own eyes”* (Judg 17:6), though Ruth being new to the land might not. Providence had led Ruth to where she would be protected and safe. Then, when she was there, she was to take upon herself the responsibility of staying safe by heeding the words of Boaz. If she would do as she had been charged and *“abide here fast by my maidens”* (Ruth 2:8), and to let *“thine eyes be on the field that they do reap”* (Ruth 2:9), then she would save herself from many snares and troubles unknown to her. Her obedience would serve her well.

As providence worked, Ruth had the duty to cooperate in obedience. The poor and vulnerable throughout history had been exploited and taken advantage of, being considered helpless, defenceless and unprotected. Nevertheless, James points out that though they may not have an ear in the corrupt courts of men, they do receive hearing in the courts of heaven: *“the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth”* (James 5:4). The Lord often intervenes providentially on their behalf rather than miraculously. He led Ruth not to unscrupulous men, but to Boaz. Now, she had the duty to remain there.

THOUGHT: Heeding godly advice keeps us from temptations and evil.

PRAYER: *“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...”* (Matt 6:13).

THURSDAY, JULY 18

RUTH 2:8-12

JAMES 5:1-6; 1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19

*“Charge them that are rich
in this world...”*

PROVIDENCE, OBEDIENCE AND PROTECTION (3)

With riches come power and often high-mindedness. However, this ought not to be so. Riches ought not to corrupt those who receive them and make them a “curse” or “scourge” in our society. Rich men ought not to be condemned to unscrupulousness. Boaz clearly illustrated this. The rich too can be godly, humane, compassionate, and caring; and Paul urged Timothy to stress this. The Bible repeatedly addresses the issue of the rich and the poor, showing that they are both created by God (1 Sam 2:7; Prov 22:2). It highlights the relation the rich ought to have with the poor by instruction (Prov 14:31; 19:17; 22:7-9) and by example (2 Cor 8:9; Luke 16:19-31).

“...when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink...” (Ruth 2:9). The picture given of Boaz clearly illustrates the responsibility of the masters towards their servants. The care and compassion he had was seen in the provisions he had made for their welfare, provisions of which Ruth was invited to enjoy. There were vessels to hold water for drinking and young men to draw water and make it available for the servants to quench their thirst. There were also provisions available for them to satisfy their hunger (Ruth 2:14) and Ruth was invited to share and partake of both the water when thirsty, and the bread when hungry.

Wealth should not displace God or dehumanise the wealthy. Life is not defined by possessions and, as such, should not be controlled by it. Our wealth should not lure us away from God, but rather be considered as the orderings of providence for the service of God and the brethren. The riches of this world should not choke us and make us unfruitful in good works (Luke 8:14) as they are transient (Prov 23:5). God’s Word reminds us of the limitations of riches and the value of righteousness. Proverbs 11:4: *“Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.”* It also reminds us of the duty to do good to all men as we get the opportunity to do so (Gal 6:6, 10).

THOUGHT: (Read Deuteronomy 8:10-18.)

PRAYER: Father, help us not to be led away by the deceitfulness of riches, but to remember Thee and do good to all men.

FRIDAY, JULY 19

RUTH 2:8-12

1 THESSALONIANS 5:14-22

“...they regard not
the works of the LORD,
nor the operations of His hand...”

PROVIDENCE, OBEDIENCE AND PROTECTION (4)

Ingratitude is the face of man's depravity as presented in Romans 1:21: “*when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.*” And from it springs all expressions of rebellion, wilfulness and the repercussions. Romans 1:18-32 lists the downfall and downgrade of society. It is important for God's children to be thankful and grateful. Gratitude is the acknowledging, and laying to heart, of the good and grace that have been extended to us. Malachi 2:2 teaches us that when blessings become abused by one who is ungrateful, God turns the blessing to a curse. Gratitude magnifies God and acknowledges Him as the source and fountain of all blessings and goodness, while ingratitude magnifies man making the rich high-minded and the poor entitled, both thinking that they deserve the wealth and help they get from God.

“Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground...” (Ruth 2:10). Ruth was filled with gratitude and responded with humility. Her question did not arise out of suspicion, but was rather an expression of how she perceived herself in light of the words and notice Boaz had of her. She had received assurance of protection that she did not expect, and an invitation to provisions that were not commonplace. It is not every day that one hears the words she heard, or receives the offers as those extended to her. She wondered at the honour and attention Boaz gave her, right on her first day out in the fields gleaning. As she set out seeking the field of the one “*in whose sight I shall find grace,*” surely she had not expected the extent of grace shown her. And as there was no sense of entitlement, there was the humble and hearty response of gratitude.

How much more should we be grateful? We who “*were dead in sins*” (Eph 2:5), but are given life. We who “*like sheep have gone astray*” (Isa 53:6), but are now found. We who were poor, naked and hungry, yet received the invitation to come “*buy, and eat: yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price*” (Isa 55:1).

THOUGHT: Ingratitude flows from a wrong self-estimation (Rev 3:17).

PRAYER: Draw me to Thee with thanksgiving and praise, O Father.

SATURDAY, JULY 20

RUTH 2:8-12

GALATIANS 6:7-10

“...whatsoever a man soweth,
that shall he also reap.”

PROVIDENCE, OBEDIENCE AND PROTECTION (5)

The past is rarely forgotten, and what goes around eventually comes around. The law of providence brings with it the law of sowing and reaping. What one gives is what one expects, and Christ presenting guidelines for godly Christian life in the Sermon on the Mount summarises it thus: “*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets*” (Matt 7:12).

“All that thou hast done unto thy mother in law...The LORD recompense thy work...” (Ruth 2:11-12). The response of Boaz to Ruth’s gratitude and question is a summary of the first chapter of Ruth. How he came to know “*all that thou hast done ... since the death of thine husband*” is not told to us, but his knowledge of Ruth’s past kindness is clear. Yet, even as Boaz said this to Ruth, he made sure to point out to her that it was the LORD who would recompense her. She should not consider the kindness he showed to her as payment for the kindness she had shown to her mother-in-law. She should not see Boaz as the payer, but rather continue to look to God as the sole Benefactor of all good deeds. Boaz himself did not know how God would answer his prayer and good will for Ruth.

“...under whose wings thou art come to trust” (Ruth 2:12). The resolve and declaration of Ruth in 1:16-17 most definitely comes to mind here. Ruth’s firm response to Naomi as they left Moab was her confession of faith in the LORD. She would not retain or introduce aspects of her old life or religion as she went with Naomi back to Bethlehem. She sought to be included in the LORD’S covenant and as such be partaker of His goodness. How everything would turn out though unknown to her, unfolded before her right from her first encounter with the provisions of the LORD’S law in the Promised Land. She had come to trust Him under His wings, and He showed Himself faithful to those who trust in Him.

THOUGHT: Meditate on the lyrics of the hymn “Under the Care of My God, the Almighty.”

PRAYER: (Use Psalm 91:1-2.)

PROVIDENCE AND THE BLESSINGS OF OBEDIENCE (1)

Gracious words are like a healing balm to a wounded heart, and can be life-giving and revitalising. The experience of Ruth, thus far as recorded, had not been a pleasant one. Widowed and a stranger in a land where she was referred to as "*the Moabitess*" (Ruth 1:22; 2:2, 6), having to go out after the reapers to glean for a living, the words that Boaz spoke to her were full of grace, and came with a prayer of blessing from the LORD. They were words that acknowledged her efforts and her faith at a time when life was difficult and hard. When we are privileged and are approached by the underprivileged, we often fail in our speech and are harsh and insensitive with our words. We ought rather to speak of faith and the grace of God that can minister to their souls and hearts.

"...thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly..." (Ruth 2:13). The response of Ruth to the words of Boaz presents to us the value of gracious words. It is a stark contrast to Job's response to Eliphaz in Job 16:1-5. When under the stress and strain of life, burdened with life's heavy load, and weighed down with sorrows and grief, what one needs is a mouth that strengthens, and lips that assuage one's grief. Proverbs 16:24: "*Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.*" We do not know what she thought or anticipated as she had audience with Boaz, but what she heard was evidence to her that indeed God had led her to the field of "*him in whose sight I shall find grace*" (Ruth 2:2). She acknowledged that when she said, "*Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord*" (Ruth 2:13).

A clear distinction has to be made between gracious/pleasant words and flattery. Gracious words "*minister grace unto the hearers*" (Eph 4:29), and, as such, edify and build up while "*a flattering mouth worketh ruin*" (Prov 26:28). The words of Boaz were not deceptive or manipulative, but rather helpful, encouraging and supportive. They brought dignity and value to Ruth and strengthened her during a very hard period of her life.

THOUGHT: (Read Proverbs 15:1-4.)

PRAYER: (Use Psalm 141:3 and Psalm 19:14.)

MONDAY, JULY 22

RUTH 2:13-17

JAMES 2:14-20

*“If a brother or sister be naked,
and destitute of daily food...”*

PROVIDENCE AND THE BLESSINGS OF OBEDIENCE (2)

The power of the Christian’s testimony is in the harmony of word and deed. The apostle John said, *“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth”* (1 John 3:18). The message of the Gospel is to be combined with the life and conduct of the preacher and believer. The believer’s influence is in the life-changing message of Christ coupled with the selfless service following the example of Christ. Boaz not only spoke gracious, pleasant, and encouraging words to Ruth, he went a step further with practical and helpful deeds that were needful for Ruth in her situation then. He invited her to share the food that had been prepared for the reapers. A gleaner treated as a reaper!

“...and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed...” (Ruth 2:14). The parched corn was made from grains of barley or wheat that were not yet fully dry and were hard. They were roasted over fire in a pan or iron plate probably like how peanuts are roasted. Ruth was conscious of her place. Ruth 2:13 reveals how she saw herself: *“I be not like unto one of thine handmaids.”* She was grateful and satisfied with the grace shown her through the pleasant words and the opportunity to glean. She knew that she was not more important than them, yet kindness was extended to her beyond just the words. An invitation was extended to her to have a share in the provisions made by the master for his servants. What a gracious picture for us to learn from; one who was in the fields not by invitation, but only because of the gracious provisions of the LORD, who was allowed to pick only that which was left behind or forgotten, was invited to sit with those whose presence and work in the field was recognised by the master, and partake of the meal that was prepared for the reapers.

Christian service and good deeds are to be extended, according to the teaching of Christ (Matt 5:43-48) and His example (John 13:13-15). And they are to be done when providence presents us with the opportunity to do so (Gal 6:10).

THOUGHT: (Meditate on the hymn “Something for Thee.”)

PRAYER: “Give me a faithful heart – likeness to Thee,” O Lord.

TUESDAY, JULY 23

RUTH 2:13-17

PROVERBS 10:1-6

“...but the hand of the
diligent maketh rich.”

PROVIDENCE AND THE PROFIT OF DILIGENCE (1)

Ruth's decision to set out that morning to “*glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace*” is a decision that has many lessons for God's children. The unfolding events of the day present to us the manifold workings of providence both for us who go out in trust and faith, and for others whom we may not know, but whose paths cross ours as we seek God's will and providence for our lives. The Book of Proverbs speaks about the blessings and benefits of diligence in many places and some of them can be illustrated by the workings of providence on behalf of Ruth.

“And when she was risen up to glean...” (Ruth 2:15). This presents to us the first lesson. Providence makes provisions, but the provisions of providence are received by the righteous who serve with hands of diligence. The principle in Proverbs is that “*the LORD will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish,*” yet He who feedeth the fowls of the air (Matt 6:26) does not drop the food into their mouths as they sit on their perches. The lesson from the birds on diligence has led to the English Proverb: “The early bird catches the worm.” Matthew Henry commenting on Matthew 6:26 notes, “There are various sorts of fowls, but they are all fed. It is rare that any of them perish for want of food, even in winter. You are dearer to God. He is their Master and Lord, their owner; but besides this, He is your Father. You are His children. He that feeds His birds surely will not starve His babes. They trust your Father's providence; will you not trust it?”

Ruth went out trusting, and God provided exceeding abundantly above what she could have thought or expected. However, God's provision did not fall on her lap as she sat under some shade. She rose up to glean, though she had heard words full of grace and favour. She rose up to glean even after she “*did eat, and was sufficed.*” She had received grace but did not abuse the grace. She was invited for a meal, but ate enough to allow her to return to work, and not to be unable to work!

THOUGHT: “He who feeds His birds surely will not starve His babes.”

PRAYER: Father, help me to always do my best as I trust in Thee.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 24
RUTH 2:13-17
HEBREWS 6:9-12

*“In all labour there is profit:
but the talk of the lips
tendeth only to penury.”*

PROVIDENCE AND THE PROFIT OF DILIGENCE (2)

The profit of diligence is reaped with consistency. The testimony concerning Ruth in 2:7, was that she *“hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.”* But even after Boaz had spoken kindly of her and taken notice of her, and after she had received invitation to share a meal with the reapers and was satisfied, she returned to her work. She had eaten and drunk to receive strength for her business, not to indulge herself and be unfit to work. Grace received should always strengthen the heart and hand for work.

“...Let her glean even among the sheaves... And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her...” (Ruth 2:15-16). The hand of providence was not done with Ruth. Unknown to her, as she went back to her gleaning, was the instruction that would make abundant provision for her. The instruction was a very charitable one. It was one that brought charity with dignity. The charity she would receive was both subject and commensurate to her effort and diligence. She had been diligent since morning. If she continued with the same zeal and effort, she would get more. The command was permissive and relational. It rested on how the workers would treat her as she went about her work with diligence. *“Let her glean”* (Ruth 2:15) was the permission given. In her continued effort and zeal, she might draw near the sheaves not yet reaped, not with intention to intrude but out of concentration on her task. And when that happened, *“let her glean.”* *“Let fall also some”* (Ruth 2:16) was the permission extended. These were purposeful provisions made for her. The reapers were instructed to be conscious of her, such that if they knew she was behind them and would glean, then they would let some handfuls fall in her path on purpose. Diligence sustained brings profit. Boaz did not give her the corn, but allowed her to earn the corn. He did not rob her of her self-respect; he rewarded and reinforced her work ethic, and at the same time practised Christ’s principle in giving: *“Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth”* (Matt 6:3).

THOUGHT: Kindness kept private preserves the receiver’s dignity.

PRAYER: Father, may I be diligent in work, and courteous in kindness.

THURSDAY, JULY 25

RUTH 2:12-17

PROVERBS 14:23

“The substance of a diligent man is precious.”

PROVIDENCE AND THE PROFIT OF DILIGENCE (3)

The meanest of work has its rewards to those who, through diligent commitment, give themselves to honest labour. Ruth is an example of this. We can love and excel even in the commonest or lowest of jobs. The orderings of providence are also such that we have to labour to prepare and use what God has graciously provided. What has been provided can be lost if those who receive it are negligent and lazy. Proverbs presents this in 12:27 when it says, *“The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is precious.”* There is necessity for active and cooperative obedience to God’s hand of providence, and this is what diligence is.

“So she gleaned in the field until even...” (Ruth 2:17). She began in the morning, and continued until even. Probably as long as the reapers were still reaping, there was possibility of gleaning. She worked till even, and after the gleaning was done, there was still some beating to be done. This was unlike the sluggard who goes hunting and comes back successfully with meat, yet fails to prepare it to turn it into a meal. The sluggard is one who has the ability to work but not the will to do so. Ruth, on the other hand, went out willing and diligent, and took upon her the duty and personal responsibility to work, and ensured that what God had graciously provided was profitable.

“...and it was about an ephah of barley” (Ruth 2:17). The reward of her day’s labour is recorded for us. She had an ephah of barley. Different parts of the world use different measurement systems. The biblical measurement presented here can be clarified for us by looking at a few verses. An omer is presented as the measure that a man was able to eat in a day (Exod 16:16-22). The omer is also presented as a tenth part of an ephah in Exodus 16:36. Thus, what Ruth had gleaned that day would have been sufficient food to last Ruth and her mother-in-law for 5 days.

THOUGHT: (Read Ecclesiastes 9:10 and Romans 12:11.)

PRAYER: Father, grant me obedience to Thy Word, and diligence in all my duties.

FRIDAY, JULY 26

RUTH 2:18-23

ACTS 20:32-35; 1 TIMOTHY 5:3-8

“...let them learn first
to shew piety at home...”

PROVIDENCE AND THE PROFIT OF DILIGENCE (4)

Ruth returned home to Naomi at the end of her day's work with the rewards of her diligence. She had the diligence and commitment to labour the whole day, having received favour. She had the mind to be careful with the fruit of her labours and to beat what she had gleaned. She also had the heart to remember and care for her mother-in-law who had stayed at home the whole day. It is very necessary for us to work hard and diligently, but after we have laboured and received the fruit of our labour, it is equally necessary to ensure that nothing is lost or squandered, and that our families are catered for.

“...and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned...” (Ruth 2:18). The profit blesses not only the labourer who works with commitment, but also those of his household. The Bible clearly presents the believer's duty to offer support to those who are (i) weak and needy, and dependent on the hardworking believer (Acts 20:34; Eph 4:28); (ii) ministers and labourers in the Word of God serving among the believers who need sustenance (Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 5:17-18); and (iii) fellow believers and of the household of faith who may be in need of help and assistance (Gal 6:10; James 2:15-16). We work hard not because we are selfish or caught up in the pursuit of worldly profit, but rather because we can be channels for God to use to bless others. What Ruth had gleaned and went home to Naomi with, was a testimony of God's grace and providence over her.

“...and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed” (Ruth 2:18). The love, care and generosity Ruth showed to Naomi is also seen in the fact that she brought to Naomi the parched corn that was left of what she had eaten at mealtime. She had been offered a meal, but she did not eat and indulge herself to hinder her work of gleaning. She had been mindful and thoughtful of her mother-in-law back at home and ate what sufficed her, and brought what was left of the portion that was given her to eat for her mother-in-law.

THOUGHT: Putting God first in life means being responsible in life.

PRAYER: Grant me faith to trust Thee, and grace to obey Thee, fully.

SATURDAY, JULY 27
RUTH 2:18-23
MATTHEW 6:25-34

“...your heavenly Father
knoweth that ye have need
of all these things.”

PROVIDENCE AND THE PROFIT OF DILIGENCE (5)

The question Naomi posed to Ruth made it clear that she could visibly see and deduce from the amount of barley Ruth had gleaned, that she had received favour. Although many times the hand and workings of providence may be hidden to us and others, the blessings that the hand of providence effects in our lives are evident to all. God, who sees in secret, answers in public. God’s care over our lives may be hidden at times, but the fruit of His care is unmistakable. We may not know how, but we can be sure that if we trust in Him and put Him first in our lives, and if we commit ourselves and our ways to Him and do what we know He requires of us, He will take care of us.

“...Where hast thou gleaned today? And where wroughtest thou?...” (Ruth 2:19). This verse acknowledges God’s guiding providence as well as Ruth’s work and diligence. The first question asked of Ruth was: “Where hast thou gleaned today?” Ruth was still a stranger in the land, so she would not have known the land and its people enough to know where and how to place herself strategically for the best results. When she left Naomi in the morning, she went out uncertain, seeking out “in whose sight I shall find grace.” God’s guiding providence led her there. Then, the second question “where wroughtest thou?” recognised that she had put in effort and had been diligent. Though she went out uncertain, she also went out with resolve. She had told her mother-in-law: “let me now go to the field and glean.” And the grain she returned with clearly indicated that she did what she had set out to do. She gleaned!

Though life may have its uncertainties, and we may not fully know what is in store for us in any given day, we must face life with a resolve and determination founded on a confidence and trust in the care and love of God. Jesus warned us about putting our trust and heart in earthly treasure and worrying about the daily things of life, ignoring and forsaking God.

THOUGHT: “Be not dismayed whatever betide, God will take care of you!”

PRAYER: O Father, help me beneath Thy wings of love to abide.

LORD'S DAY, JULY 28

RUTH 2:18-23

MATTHEW 6:25-34

“...the morrow shall take thought
for the things of itself...”

PROVIDENCE AND THE PROFIT OF DILIGENCE (6)

The answer Ruth gave to Naomi confirmed to Naomi the workings and the hand of the providence of God in Ruth's day. The events of the day might have seemed strange, and definitely favourable to Ruth, but she did not understand the full extent of the grace and favour that she had been shown. At evening, as she returned home and responded to Naomi's enquiry, things that had been until then unknown, began to unfold.

“...The man's name with whom I wrought today is Boaz” (Ruth 2:19). The world seeks to promote secrecy in almost everything, even within the family. Ruth's day had been very blessed. Naomi's questions did not offend her. She responded truthfully and openly. Taking into account especially that the conversation was between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law, a relationship that in most places is strained by competition for the affections of the same man, we find a picture of the blessings that accompany a cordial, warm, open, caring and loving godly relationship. What blessings were in store as she honoured her mother-in-law with truthful and honest answers, which until then were unknown to Ruth.

We ought to remember that Naomi's testimony to both her daughters-in-law was that they had been kind in their dealings with her (Ruth 1:8); and that it was Ruth's choice to accompany and live with her mother-in-law (Ruth 1:16). It was also Ruth's choice and initiative to go out to glean that morning (Ruth 2:2) and she had gone out with full knowledge, permission, and blessing of her mother-in-law (Ruth 2:2). Her relationship with her mother-in-law was not secret, and word had gone around on how she had honoured Naomi since her husband's death (Ruth 2:11). At the end of the day, she came with all that she had gleaned, without hiding from her mother-in-law, and brought to her what she had saved from what she was given to eat while she worked in the field. She did not know Boaz, but Naomi did, and that would change her life.

THOUGHT: Godly relations bless all who choose to cultivate them.

PRAYER: Father, bless me with godly, healthy relationships that edify.

MONDAY, JULY 29

RUTH 2:18-23

GENESIS 24:12-27

*“...hath not left destitute my master
of his mercy and his truth...”*

PROVIDENCE PICTURED AND DESCRIBED PRACTICALLY

Naomi's joy for Ruth and the fruit of her labour was unmistakable. As she asked where Ruth had gleaned that day, she blessed the LORD for He was the one who had taken note of her daughter-in-law. She said, “...*blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee...*” (Ruth 2:19), but she did not know the full workings of God's hand of providence until Ruth mentioned the name of “*he that did take knowledge*” of her. The quantity of the grain that Ruth had gleaned was evidence of kindness and generosity, but the mention of the name Boaz was evidence of God's hand of providence extended to them.

“...*Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead...*” (Ruth 2:20). Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, when he was sent on a very important mission and bound by an oath in his quest for a wife for Isaac, upon arrival outside the city to which he was sent, standing by a well, prayed for guidance. In his prayer he said, “*I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham.*” He was confident that God would act towards Abraham in accordance with His covenant with Abraham, and Eliezer described God's act on behalf of Abraham by the words “*shew kindness unto my master Abraham.*” The guiding hand of providence was pictured and described both by Eliezer in his errand for his master and by Naomi in her response to Ruth's answer as “*kindness.*”

Boaz had shown favour to Ruth, and Naomi recognised the kindness that Ruth had received. Galatians 6:10: “*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*” Just as God's hand of providence moved Boaz to show favour and do good, God still moves His children and directs them to act kindly towards others, and through their acts of kindness and the mercy they extend to their brethren, God meets needs, answers prayers, and providentially accomplishes His purposes.

THOUGHT: (Read Psalm 84:11.)

PRAYER: Grant me, Father, faith in Thy providence and grace to serve others.

TUESDAY, JULY 30

RUTH 2:18-23

LEVITICUS 25:23-28, 47-55

“...ye shall grant a
redemption for the land.”

PROVIDENCE AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY (1)

The Law of Moses had made provisions for different scenarios and circumstances of life. Among them was that of slavery and loss of property through poverty. Man is responsible for his life, though at times life's circumstances are beyond man's control. There was recognition in Leviticus that foreigners and resident aliens might become rich in Israel, and the children of Israel might become poor in their own land. The poverty of the children of Israel might bring them under servitude either to their brethren or to foreigners in the land. The law of the land as given by Moses was that the children of Israel would be eligible for redemption from bondage at any time either by a relative or kinsman, or by themselves, and thus be set free in the year of Jubilee.

“...The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen” (Ruth 2:20). Naomi saw the providence of God in the kindness of Boaz to Ruth. She also recognised that there was personal responsibility as the logical and proper response to the workings of providence. Naomi having heard and known it was Boaz who had showed kindness to Ruth, and recognising the hand of God, immediately explained to Ruth the relation that Boaz had with them. Through this, she introduced Ruth to the God-given provisions for the redemption of the lands of Elimelech and the continuation of his lineage. Naomi understood that the LORD had made provision for restoring the lands that belonged to her husband's family and continuing the family name, and she was grateful to the LORD. Her gratitude is clear in her blessing of Boaz when she said, “*Blessed be he of the LORD.*” She then explained to Ruth that Boaz was a near kin. In the law of Moses, the kinsman-redeemer was a male relative who had the privilege, right and responsibility to act on behalf and help a relative who was destitute, in need, in trouble, in danger or in slavery. The kinsman was the one who would rescue or deliver the relative in need either of personal deliverance or property redemption.

THOUGHT: The working of providence calls for man's responsibility.

PRAYER: Father, teach me to see and respond to Thy hand of providence at work in my life.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 31

RUTH 2:18-23

GENESIS 38:1-11

*“Their Redeemer is strong;
the LORD of hosts is his name...”*

PROVIDENCE AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY (2)

God’s providential provision for the safety, security and sustenance of the weakest members of society when death and misfortune struck was envisioned in part in the responsibility and duty taken up by the members of the family. This is seen in the “Kinsman-Redeemer.” This was a man, a member of the family, who was given the right to intervene on behalf of vulnerable family members in matters where there was (i) danger of losing inheritance; (ii) danger of slavery and loss of liberty; (iii) danger of losing lineage; (iv) shedding of blood and matters of vengeance; and (v) need for compensation for the deceased.

1. When there is danger of loss of inheritance (Lev 25:23-27). The Promised Land was God’s land, and as such, it belonged to God. The land was promised by God to Abraham. The Israelites were redeemed from Egypt and led to the Promised Land by God through Moses. The inhabitants of the land were removed by God through Joshua during the conquest, and the land was assigned to the families by God according to the instructions of the Lord to Moses and by lot through Joshua. Therefore, the land was not to be sold permanently. In any case that the land was sold and exchanged, provision of redemption was to be made. The Kinsman-Redeemer did not purchase the land for himself but, rather, he bought it to return it.

2. When there was danger of slavery and loss of liberty (Lev 25:47-49). The children of Israel were God’s children, His peculiar treasure. He had chosen Abraham from out of his kindred, and redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt with a mighty hand. He gave instructions on how they were to relate to one another in the land. When any of the children of God was sold to slavery, whether it was to their brothers or foreigners, provision was made for their redemption. If he could not redeem himself from debt and slavery, then a near kinsman would pay the price for his freedom. The Kinsman-Redeemer redeemed his brother not to enslave him again or lord over him, but to set him free.

THOUGHT: (Read Philippians 2:3-8.)

PRAYER: Father, grant me concern for the welfare of others.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 1

RUTH 2:18-23

DEUTERONOMY 19:1-13

“...*deliver him into the hand
of the avenger of blood...*”

PROVIDENCE AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY (3)

God had set the year of Jubilee which came every fifty years, in which all persons sold into slavery were to be set free, and all lands that had been sold were to be released back to their original possessors. But before the year of Jubilee came, there was the possibility of accomplishing the same through the kinsman-redeemer. However, the duty of the kinsman extended beyond the freedom of enslaved relatives and their sold property. The kinsman-redeemer also had responsibility on issues regarding life.

3. When the lineage was in danger of being lost (Deut 25:5-6). If a man died without children to bear his name or inherit his property, then the duty of “raising up seed” was committed to a kinsman, specifically his brother in this case. The family was to be maintained, and if the man died having no child, the brother was to produce a seed for his deceased brother who would inherit his property and maintain the family name. In Genesis 38, we are given one example of this, where the man who was unwilling to fulfil his brother’s responsibility was punished by the LORD. This would also keep the land within the family and not let it go to “strangers,” as the widow would be married within the family and not outside of the family.

4. When there is shedding of blood and matters of vengeance (Num 35:19-21). The Ten Commandments clearly forbid the taking of life, and the provision for both the kinsman “avenger” and the cities of refuge were to prevent the shedding of innocent blood. Slaying a man was taking what belongs to God, and blood was to be given for blood and life for life. The cities of refuge were to give time for determining whether the killing was intentional or unintentional (Num 35:12). If it was determined that it was intentional, the murderer was to be handed over to be killed (Num 35:16-18). If the person left the city of refuge before the appointed time and was met by the avenger of blood, he could be slain by the avenger without him (the avenger) bearing any guilt (Num 35:26-28).

THOUGHT: (Read Job 19:25 and Hebrews 2:11, 16-18.)

PRAYER: (Use Hebrews 4:14-16.)

FRIDAY, AUGUST 2

RUTH 2:18-23

NUMBERS 5:5-10

“...let the trespass be recompensed
unto the LORD...”

PROVIDENCE AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY (4)

This final provision was one that would help in cases where restitution was needed for sin and defilement to be put away. God's presence among His people was conditioned upon the absence of that which defiled within their camp. When there was sin or trespass in the camp, steps were to be taken to have the sin put away. In some cases, the steps would include confession and restitution for the restoration of harmony in the camp.

“But if the man have no kinsman to recompense the trespass unto...” (Num 5:8). The provision of the kinsman was to include receiving restitution on behalf of a relative who was defrauded and wronged, but was not present to receive the confession of sin and restitution for sin himself. If the man or his kinsman was not available, then the LORD was to receive the recompense. The kinsman had therefore a part in the taking away of guilt and restoring a clear conscience by receiving confession and the “fine” imposed for the offence.

Sin separates man from God, and God makes provision that through confession of sin and restitution, harmony can be restored, sin can be forgiven and conscience unburdened. All sins and false dealings committed against a neighbour is also against God (Lev 6:2-3), and the guilt offering, as outlined in Leviticus 6, was to be offered. If there was no kinsman alive to receive the compensation for guilt, then it was to be paid to the LORD, i.e. it was to be given to the priest, and this was to be beside the atonement that had to be made.

God is Redeemer of His people and is presented in the Old Testament as Father (Deut 32:6), Landlord (Lev 25:23), Avenger (Deut 19:10), and King (Exod 6:2-8). In the New Testament, Christ is presented as man's Redeemer (Heb 2:16-18; 4:14-16), One who understands our struggles and infirmities, One who is able to help us in our needs and strengthen us in our weaknesses.

THOUGHT: (Read 1 John 1:9.)

PRAYER: (Use Psalm 25:6-11.)

SATURDAY, AUGUST 3

RUTH 2:18-23

1 KINGS 12:1-15

*“It is good, my daughter,
that thou go out with his maidens...”*

PROVIDENCE AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY (5)

Ruth, being directed by the hand of providence, had been led to the field of a blood relation of Elimelech, a kinsman. While at the field of Boaz, she had received favour and had reciprocated with hard work and commitment. As she came back home, she recounted to Naomi the events of the day and the chapter then ended with Ruth's narration of the instructions given her by Boaz, and Naomi's response to it.

“He said unto me also ... It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens...” (Ruth 2:21-22). One of the greatest challenges facing young people is receiving and obeying instructions from their elders, Rehoboam being such an example. Boaz's instructions were not to restrict Ruth, but were for her protection; and Naomi expressed her approval and concurred with what Boaz had said. Unlike Rehoboam, Ruth was content to heed and follow the instructions of Boaz and Naomi.

“So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz...and dwelt with her mother in law” (Ruth 2:23). Ruth presented a picture of the balance between trusting the leading of God's hand and the taking of responsibility for one's life and welfare. She went out in faith at the beginning of the chapter, and as the chapter ends, she continued and lived in obedience to instruction and guidance. She followed Boaz's maidens through the barley and wheat harvests, and through this time, had provisions for daily sustenance and protection from the dangers and ills that faced young and vulnerable women like her while out gleaning. She not only heeded Naomi's words, but also continued to dwell with her through all this time. She continued to provide for Naomi's needs and, as she continued to live with her, had security and counsel in the home when she came back from the fields. Young people put themselves in unnecessary pains and dangers through self-will and desire for independence when they cut themselves off from invaluable experience and wisdom from godly parents and elders.

THOUGHT: God's Law requires obedience to parents in the Lord.

PRAYER: O Father, help me to trust Thee and be obedient to godly advice.

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (1)

Families in general face unprecedented strain and stress. The rates of divorce and separation are on the rise, and the number of those disillusioned by marriage is increasing. Even among Christians, there is a great challenge around the issue of marriage. Ruth chapter 3 takes place at the end of the harvest period, and gives us a good pattern for choices regarding family life. The pattern is one that involves the leading of providence coupled with the guidance of godly wisdom from parents.

"...My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" (Ruth 3:1). The previous chapter highlights the workings of the hand of providence. This chapter now turns to the guidance, godly wisdom and action required to establish one's life especially in marriage matters. Although marriage is the union between one man and one woman according to God's holy ordinance, and involves forsaking father and mother in order to cleave to one another, the process by which the two enter into this union is not to be secretive and limited to the two of them. In the case of Ruth, Naomi took the initiative on behalf of Ruth.

The initiative that Naomi took was to "seek rest" on behalf of Ruth. This gives us her perspective for family life. This was her desire even as she bade her two daughters-in-law leave and return to their homes. Ruth 1:9: *"The LORD grant ye that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband."* The initiative Naomi was taking was that which she probably believed their mothers would have taken on their behalf as she had bidden them, *"Go, return each to her mother's house"* (Ruth 1:8). As their mother-in-law, she had considered it her duty to provide husbands for them, hence she had asked them, *"why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?"* (Ruth 1:11). The husband's home is God's provision for the protection, safety, welfare and honour for the wife, and it is there that the wife finds a place to practise piety and give no occasion to the adversary (Titus 2:4-5; 1 Tim 5:14).

THOUGHT: Marriage is an honourable and godly estate.

PRAYER: Father, grant us godly homes that offer refuge for the family.

MONDAY, AUGUST 5
RUTH 3:1-5
GENESIS 2:18-24

“...thou shalt do that which is right
and good in the sight of the LORD:
that it may be well with thee...”

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (2)

From the picture that is drawn from the initiative of Naomi on behalf of Ruth, we see the home as a place of security, rest and piety for the wife. This means that the choice of the person one marries or gets married to is of great importance. Many marriages do not progress well in part because they did not start well. They were not founded on the right principles or started on the right footing. This also stresses why guidance is essential in the process of getting a husband or a wife.

“My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?” (Ruth 3:1). What Naomi sought for Ruth was: (1) a secure home, (“seek rest for thee”) and (2) a happy home (“it may be well with thee”).

1. A secure home – Married life is not intended for turmoil, but rather for rest. As the wife seeks rest in her husband’s home, the husband procures, promotes and maintains rest for his wife in his home. This he does by providing for her, protecting her, leading as head of the family and modelling godliness in the home (Ps 128:1).

2. A happy home – This points, secondly, that a marriage that is entered into well (with God’s guidance through His Word and with godly counsel from spiritual parents), progresses well. Naomi desired and sought for Ruth that “it may be well with thee.” It is a phrase that appears severally in the Bible. This phrase is appended to the Fifth Commandment as a promise that accompanies the children who fulfil their God-given duty (Deut 5:16). It also appears in other verses in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah and is conditioned by obedience and adherence to God and His Word. A happy home, therefore, is one where there is obedience to God and His Word (Jer 7:23; Deut 4:40; 5:33). How often we run into ruin and pierce ourselves with many sorrows, because we think there are other ways to procure and maintain marital happiness outside of God’s ordinances, and ignore God-ordained roles and responsibilities in marriage.

THOUGHT: “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus.”

PRAYER: O Father, give us homes where Christ is Lord and Master.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 6
RUTH 3:1-5
PROVERBS 18:22; 19:14

*"I will therefore that
the younger women marry,
bear children, guide the house..."*

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (3)

When Ruth went out to look for a place to glean, she committed herself to the leading of providence. But now as Naomi sought to get rest for her in the house of a husband, she took deliberate and calculated steps. A secure and happy home cannot be achieved by chance. The Book of Proverbs is clear in that a good and godly wife is given by the LORD. In the Book of Psalms, the Psalmist categorically asserted, *"Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain"* (Ps 127:1).

"...is not Boaz of our kindred..." (Ruth 3:2). The process began with a reference to Boaz. This reference was important because it set the tone for the whole process. A Christian marriage requires those who enter into it do so in the Lord, and as such it must be as God's Word doth allow. The mention of Boaz as a kindred would make the marriage lawful as God's Word and the Law of Moses said that a widow *"shall not marry without unto a stranger"* (Deut 25:5). As such, the union that Naomi sought for Ruth would be one that was in accordance with God's revealed will and thus a lawful one. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul pointed out a similar principle when he said, *"The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord"* (1 Cor 7:39). Christian marriage must be strictly between Christians. Before beginning the process of pursuing a relationship that leads to marriage, the first things that must be ascertained (i.e. the prerequisites) are faith in Christ and the lawfulness of the union in accordance with God's Word. In the marriage liturgy, the couple presenting themselves for holy matrimony are solemnly charged: "For be ye well assured, that if any persons are joined together otherwise than as God's Word doth allow, their marriage is not lawful." If a couple prays for and expects God's blessings and help in their home, they must first submit themselves to God's revealed will and ordinance.

THOUGHT: Choose to obey God and live with joy, not with regrets.
PRAYER: Father, give me the grace to obey Thy word in life's choices.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 7

RUTH 3:1-5

EPHESIANS 5:1-11

*“Proving what is acceptable
unto the Lord.”*

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (4)

Naomi's instructions to Ruth were based on the ordinances of God, but it would also be needful to consider the law of the land and the accepted practice among God's people at that time. The workings of providence do not exclude the use of means. However, the means used by those who trust God must be godly and lawful, and commonly accepted. Eliezer, when sent to look for a wife for Isaac in Genesis 24, went to a well; and so did Jacob, and there Rachel was pointed out to him in Genesis 29. In the case of Ruth, she was sent to the threshing floor.

“...Behold, he winnoweth barley tonight in the threshingfloor” (Ruth 3:2). Just as in the case of Eliezer and Jacob where providence would work together with human initiative and action, the actions were not novel or uncommon acts, but accepted and normal actions. Wells were mostly communal and, as such, good meeting points. Water is vital to sustain life, and so wells would be sources for daily sustenance and visited by all. Hence, it was a communal and social place where strangers would easily find help and direction. In the case of Ruth, Naomi sent her to a public and social gathering.

Providence had led Ruth to the field of Boaz, a God-fearing man, and a man who had shown great compassion and care to Ruth. He even warned the young men not to touch her. Naomi sent her to the threshing floor with the prospect of marriage, knowing that Boaz was *“our kindred.”* Just as a well was a communal place, so would the threshing floor be in the days of Ruth. The act of winnowing required an open and raised place where winds could blow the chaff as the grains fell. (This is in contrast with Gideon who threshed wheat by the winepress to hide from the Midianites who had invaded the land at harvest time.) According to Ruth 2:17, Ruth had probably visited the threshing floor, and there *“beat out what she had gleaned.”* The threshing floor would therefore have been an open place outside the city since Ruth, after threshing and winnowing what she had gleaned, *“took it up, and went into the city”* (Ruth 2:18).

THOUGHT: Those who follow God's leading will use lawful means.

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to resist sinful and wilful ways in life.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 8

RUTH 3:1-5

1 PETER 3:1-6

“...that women adorn themselves
in modest apparel, with
shamefacedness and sobriety...”

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (5)

Naomi's plan of action was both lawful and decent. It adhered to the laws of the land and its social bonds. Ruth probably might not have understood all that was required of her, but she knew her mother-in-law and she dutifully submitted herself to follow her mother-in-law's guidance. Naomi asked her to prepare herself for the task that she was to do that evening.

“Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee...” (Ruth 3:3). Ruth had been working in the fields as a gleaner. She had worked through the barley and the wheat harvests. Then, Naomi told her to “put thy raiment upon thee.” In our culture today (and probably in any culture known), what Ruth was asked to do might imply a desire to get others to “take notice of me.” However, from the characters presented both of Ruth and of Boaz from the beginning of the Book of Ruth, we may confidently assert that there was nothing immoral or indecent in the plan. Though Ruth had been working hard, and her work had yielded great rewards, Naomi did not advise her to procure or look for new clothes, but rather that she “put thy raiment upon thee.” And so, Ruth cleaned up and changed her clothes as instructed by Naomi.

“...and get thee down to the floor...” (Ruth 3:3). J. Vernon McGee notes concerning going to the threshing floor that, “They feasted and sang psalms and hymns and thanked God for an abundant harvest. Several of the feast days of Israel – the Feast of Firstfruits and even Pentecost – were identified with that threshing floor. Every night the families came up and camped around the threshing floor, and they would eat a big meal together. After the feast was over, the men would sleep around the grain to protect it from looters or thieves who might break through the circle and steal their harvest.” Hence, that Ruth was sent to the threshing floor was not out of ordinary practice. It would make it easier for her to fulfil the second part, which was to “make not thyself known unto the man.” Noting where Boaz would be sleeping was also possible because the men slept at the threshing floor to secure their produce.

THOUGHT: (Read Ephesians 5:17.)

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to walk with wisdom for Thy glory.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 9
RUTH 3:1-5
DEUTERONOMY 25:5-10

“...the wife of the dead
shall not marry without
unto a stranger.”

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (6)

We now come to the most critical and interesting part of Naomi's instructions to Ruth. Some things and actions when heard, may sound strange to those who are not familiar with the social or cultural practices. And so did Naomi's instructions to Ruth. Just as our customs may sound strange to some, theirs would sound strange to us. But, considering the characters of the persons involved as have been presented to us, we must be careful not to read our own perspectives into the narrative.

“...mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in...” (Ruth 3:4). The message that Ruth had to bear was a proposal for marriage. Ruth agreed to bear the proposal. She had taken upon herself the burden to go and glean, and God led her, granted her grace and blessed her effort. Likewise, this second mission was similar to the first in that it was within the provisions of God for the widow. The same God who made provisions for gleaning by the widows, is the same God who made provisions for Levirate marriage. If she could commit herself to God's leading in seeking out daily sustenance, she should also be able to commit herself to the same God to lead in seeking security and joy in her husband's home. We cannot say how much Ruth knew about her mission that night, but Naomi knew, and Ruth trusted and obeyed Naomi. As recorded in the account here, Naomi's instructions did not come with explanations, and Ruth responded with unquestioned obedience. We who trust God in many areas of life, must be ready and willing to trust God in all areas of life. God's provisions in Deuteronomy 25 put Levirate marriage almost as a right of the widow in that she had recourse to the elders of the land in case the brother refused (Deut 25:7-10). She would go to the elders, and they would call him to question him, and if he refused before the elders, then she could put him to shame by removing his shoe. Surely God who made such provisions would be pleased to guide and bless those who sought His help for His honour in seeking rest, like Naomi and Ruth did.

THOUGHT: I can pray for God's help when I seek to do His will.

PRAYER: Grant, O Father, that I may trust in Christ and obey His Word as I seek in life things that are in accordance with Thy will.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 10

RUTH 3:6-13

ECCLESIASTES 9:7-12

“...and he will tell thee what
thou shalt do.”

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (7)

The place of parents in their children's marriage arrangements is important. This is well illustrated in the Old Testament, even during the period of the Judges, by Samson who, despite his wilfulness, still went back to his parents asking them to “*get her for me to wife*” (Judg 14:2). This shows that it was not only the girl's parents who sought rest for their daughter, but the young man's parents also. Thus far in this chapter, Naomi had taken upon herself the responsibility to secure Ruth's life and joy. Ruth responded with willingness and readiness to do what her mother-in-law asked of her. This second section of the chapter now turns to Boaz and his response to Ruth's proposal.

“And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry...” (Ruth 3:7). Harvest was a testimony of God's acceptance of Israel, and a reason for joy and feasting, especially in the context of a famine that the Book of Ruth began with, driving away Elimelech's family. And Naomi and Ruth returning to the land after learning that God had visited His people by giving them bread. Yet, as the people made merry, eating and drinking joyfully, Boaz was presented as participating in this, but not without moderation. As the story unfolds, it is clear that he was not given to excess, as revealed by his behaviour. It was during seasons of feasting that the king's heart was merry, that the king Ahasuerus called for Vashti and set in motion a series of events he would regret as he remembered Vashti after his anger was appeased (Esther 1:9-2:1). It was also during such feasting that Herod made a rash vow to the daughter of Herodias that ended up with the head of John the Baptist on a platter (Matt 14:6-11). Proverbs 23:33 warns against the effects of drunkenness: “*thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.*” Boaz's words and actions showed that he still retained a right state of mind and integrity. This was necessary as (though unknown to him) he had before him a great responsibility to discharge and needed to exercise wisdom, discretion and judgment in very weighty matters. These were matters that would affect and change the lives of Ruth and Naomi, as well as fulfil God's will.

THOUGHT: Being merry without moderation can lead me to sin.

PRAYER: (Use Proverbs 30:8-9.)

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (8)

The necessity of always maintaining a sober mind in life is clearly illustrated in this account. Life may throw to us unexpected opportunities to make life-changing decisions without notice. Boaz went about the feasting and drinking not knowing that Ruth (who was yet unrecognised, as Naomi had instructed) was observing him. The sequence of events that followed as the story unfolded would place on him the duty and responsibility of making decisions that would be critical, especially for the future of Ruth and Naomi. The world often talks about getting lost in the moment, without warning against what might be lost with the moment. The Bible exhorts us to be sober at all times.

“...he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn...” (Ruth 3:7). It is noted by some commentators that it was not uncommon for immoral practices to occur during harvest periods due to the Canaanite worship of fertility gods and its practices. This, coupled with the eating, drinking and merry-making, would make it the most common recourse for depraved man. This was the picture in Genesis 38:20-23, as Judah sent the kid he had pledged to Tamar, thinking she was a prostitute. As he sent his pledge, his friend asked for the “temple prostitute” who sat openly as Judah went to shear his sheep. Boaz, on the other hand, is introduced as taking a different course of action. He went to lie down when his heart was merry. Naomi had told Ruth that *“he will tell thee what thou shalt do”* (Ruth 3:4). By this she left Ruth in the hands of Boaz, trusting that once Ruth had done her part as directed, Boaz would do his part in the matter. McGee observes that, “Ruth could have gone before the elders of the city and demanded that he do it, and she would have been within her legal rights. But the method adopted by her, at the suggestion of Naomi, was a quiet and reticent manner of proceeding.” We must remember that all this took place at the threshing floor which was a public and social place, without much privacy as both men and women slept there. Despite all the activities taking place at the threshing floor, Ruth had stuck to her mission and observed where Boaz lay.

THOUGHT: Moderation is a virtue and duty for every Christian.

PRAYER: (Use Proverbs 30:8-9.)

MONDAY, AUGUST 12
RUTH 3:6-13
MATTHEW 1:18-25

*“Then Joseph her husband,
being a just man... was minded
to put her away privily.”*

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (9)

The discretion and maturity showed by Boaz under the circumstances is clearly seen in how he handled and responded to the situation he found himself in. He presented himself as a good man. *“A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion”* (Ps 112:5). And he was also a man of great understanding. D. B. Macdonald says, *“Boaz is quietly handling the situation like a gentleman, and not either as an old fool or a village lout. He may be countrified but he has dignity and restraint.”*

“And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid...” (Ruth 3:8). It appeared that it might have taken some time for Boaz to notice that there was someone at his feet. We are not told how Boaz stirred up to the discovery of someone at his feet. Whatever it was that stirred him up, he was startled to discover Ruth at his feet. If he had been intoxicated with wine and lost soberness, this discovery would have been a very great snare and temptation to him. The Bible rightly observes: *“Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee”* (Prov 2:11). The dangers that a man devoid of wisdom and discretion faces are innumerable. They are dangers that can ruin reputation, destroy life and the body, and impoverish him. However, the possession and use of wisdom not only preserved Boaz in such an unexpected and unplanned situation, but also established him and his life.

Boaz needed to be sober, not only to respond correctly to the startling discovery at midnight, but also to understand the proposal that Ruth came with, and to address it in a lawful and biblical manner. Naomi and Ruth probably assumed that Boaz was their nearest kinsman, hence the proposal was directed to him, and they knew that he would understand and know what needed to be done. Therefore, the proposal was not presented in plain words, but it was as it were acted out by Ruth, when at midnight she requested to be covered by Boaz’s skirt (Ruth 3:9). Thus, Boaz noted that Ruth had trusted her LORD.

THOUGHT: My behaviour and habits are outcomes of my decisions.

PRAYER: (Use Proverbs 30:8-9.)

TUESDAY, AUGUST 13

RUTH 3:6-13

EZEKIEL 16:1-8

*“...I spread my skirt over thee,
and covered thy nakedness...”*

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (10)

Life situations change. Some things go according to plan, while others are not even thought of. For Boaz, overseeing the threshing and winnowing might have been planned. For Naomi and Ruth, the silent and secretive approach to where Boaz lay, and the sleeping at his feet were planned, but for Boaz these were unexpected. Yet, these were an invitation to him to take action. Many people get into trouble because of how they handle the unexpected. Boaz handled the unexpected with wisdom, discretion and maturity, and only good could come out of it.

“...Who art thou?...” (Ruth 3:9). The question Boaz posed to Ruth drew a deep response from her. She identified herself, her mission and request. *“I am Ruth thine handmaid”* was how Ruth began. Previously, she had been identified by her Moabite origin by many, including the servant who had introduced her to Boaz in Ruth 2:6. Also, in response to Boaz, she had described herself as *“a stranger”* (Ruth 2:10). And Boaz acknowledged that she had *“left... the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not...”* (Ruth 2:11). She had also seen herself as *“thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens”* (Ruth 2:13). But here in Ruth 3, she simply identified herself by name and position. She took upon herself the lowliest of positions, though she used a different Hebrew word from the words used in chapter 2. She consistently showed humility in her dealings with Boaz and presented her request for Boaz to act on her behalf.

“...spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman” (Ruth 3:9). To Boaz, it was an unexpected invitation to act on behalf of a vulnerable relative, especially Ruth, one to whom he had extended much grace during the harvest period. She asked him as a near kinsman to *“spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid”* (Ruth 3:9). She used a metaphor that was common to and well understood by them. It was an expression that had been used to describe the covenant that God had made with His people (Ezek 16:8).

THOUGHT: (Read Ephesians 5:3.)

PRAYER: (Use Proverbs 30:8-9.)

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 14

RUTH 3:6-13

PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9

“Think on these things.”

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (11)

When called upon for action, Boaz did not rush into action. He exercised wisdom and applied himself to act lawfully. In his previous interactions with Ruth, he had been very gracious. He had acknowledged the virtues that were known in Ruth and even blessed her of the LORD. When Ruth called upon him to do the part of the kinsman, even if he was inclined to do so, he did not subvert the law in order to do so. What was within his power to do, he did promptly, but what Ruth had asked was not entirely up to him. Although he was willing to do it, he did not subvert or ignore what was lawful.

“...thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning...” (Ruth 3:10). If our words are a reflection of our hearts, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, then the words of Boaz as recorded in the Book of Ruth present a picture of grace in the heart. The character of Boaz can be an illustration of the apostle Paul’s call for our *“speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt”* (Col 4:6). Although he was woken up and startled at midnight, and called upon to do what was until then unexpected to him, he was still moved by Ruth’s choice and acknowledged her kindness. He noted her sacrifice and restraint. His focus at this unexpected hour was not his interrupted sleep, or the scandal that could ruin his respectable reputation. His thoughts did not wander away from the subject matter at hand. He paid attention to Ruth’s proposal, and began to address it by acknowledging and encouraging her in the request and the choice she had made.

What effect the words had upon Ruth who had “taken a risk” and had exposed herself to possible shame or rejection in seeking out security and joy in her husband’s home. How comforting the words seasoned with grace are! Yet, we ought to ask ourselves: How many lives have been ruined by misplaced words, not well thought out or weighed, but spoken hastily and selfishly? Boaz knew he was not the nearest kin, and there was a possibility that he might not be the one to marry Ruth.

THOUGHT: (Read Proverbs 25:11.)

PRAYER: Father, may I be kind through my words, acts and attitudes.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 15
RUTH 3:6-13
2 SAMUEL 2:5-7

“...I also will requite you
this kindness, because
ye have done this thing.”

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (12)

When considering a marriage partner, what do you look for? How does one know that the person one has chosen will make a good spouse? Boaz, as he spoke, did so as one who saw Ruth's choice to marry him as an act of great kindness. He also had spoken (in chapter 2) of her kindness to her mother-in-law and the sacrifice she had made to come to Bethlehem, as well as the testimony of what she had done for her late husband. These he placed in contrast with the things she did not consider in picking him as her choice, and thus concluded that he was the recipient of Ruth's kindness. So, what makes someone a good candidate for a spouse, whether husband or wife?

“...thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning...” (Ruth 3:10). Character makes a person. Boaz considered Ruth's character. The kindness he had observed of her was kindness that she had shown not to Boaz, but rather to her late husband, probably inferred by the phrase “*at the beginning*.” In Ruth 2:11, Boaz had talked about the kindness she had shown to her mother-in-law (“*since the death of thine husband...*”) not only in coming with her to Bethlehem and thus forsaking her land of nativity, but also in going out to glean and work for their sustenance.

“...thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich” (Ruth 3:10). The second part is what she did not consider. She did not base her choice on physical considerations. She did not look at the young men; she did not consider their wealth too. What considerations do you make when seeking a spouse? Things that can change, or things that are more permanent and lasting? Eternal values help us make better choices. Temporal values may deceive us as we seek to choose who is right for us. And for those hoping or preparing for marriage, focus on your relationships with your parents and siblings, and cultivate and practise kindness and other spiritual values as they will add to your value as a spouse (whether a husband and leader, or a wife and helpmeet at home).

THOUGHT: Kindness begets, and rewards with, kindness.

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to be a kind person to all.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 16

RUTH 3:6-13

PROVERBS 22:1-4

*“A good name is better than
precious ointment.”*

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (13)

Boaz assured Ruth that he would do his best to fulfil her request. He also gave reasons for accepting to do what she had requested. The worth that he adduced was in her virtue. Many in this age seek help, assistance and even marriage not out of virtue, but ungodly influence and pressure. This has led to seeking those who are influential in getting things done. But the vulnerable and poor (who have no influence) are being overlooked and exploited. Moreover, many have in turn taken to teach their children and youths that if they want to get ahead in life, and get their way through life, they need to be clever, rich or well-connected. Christians and spiritual virtues are therefore ignored and not cultivated. Boaz accepted Ruth's request because he valued Christian and godly virtues.

“...all the city of my people do know that thou art a virtuous woman” (Ruth 3:11). Ruth's request was not just a request for marriage, it was a legal matter that involved the property that belonged to Elimelech and his sons. In her request, she not only looked for a husband, but also requested for an advocate to present her case before the elders of the land. No wonder Boaz in his response told her that he would do *“all that thou requirest.”* Cases that involve property are very emotive and messy. Some of them end badly as in the case regarding Naboth's vineyard. Boaz assured Ruth of a favourable outcome because of her virtue and character. It is sad that in this age, virtue and character are taking a back seat to money, power and influence in matters of justice.

“...there is a kinsman nearer than I” (Ruth 3:12). Even after declaring that Ruth was kind to choose him, Boaz did not hide the truth from Ruth: Someone else had precedence over him. If it was of God, he would marry Ruth, but it could not be by deceit. The one who had precedence would be given priority. Those who acknowledge God's hand must acknowledge His sovereign will, and thus abide by the law. Many who elope because of obstacles or opposition to their relationship often undermine their faith in God, and some end up with regrets later on.

THOUGHT: God controls everything; I obey Him in everything.

PRAYER: “Ask the Saviour to help you. He is willing to aid you.”

SATURDAY, AUGUST 17

RUTH 3:6-13

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-7

*“Charity suffereth long,
and is kind...”*

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (14)

After addressing Ruth’s request and offering to take up the matter to its God-ordained conclusion, Boaz called for patience. Not all things that we seek get accomplished immediately. Some take time. One of the things that takes time to build and set right is marriage. And in this age where many people expect things instantly, impatience is promoted against the virtue of patience. It was midnight when Boaz stirred up to find Ruth at his feet. We do not know how long they took in setting in order the matter at hand, but Boaz exhorted Ruth to be patient.

“Tarry this night...” (Ruth 3:13). Now that the matter had been addressed and Boaz had taken it up on her behalf, she would have to wait till morning to know her fate. At the time that the matter was raised, it could not be resolved. But just because it could not be resolved then did not mean it would not be resolved. Until the outcome was known, Ruth would have to wait.

“...if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well, let him do the kinsman’s part...” (Ruth 3:13). Apart from patience and waiting, Ruth was to wait with willingness to accept God’s will, as it would be revealed in the morning. There was another kinsman, so although Naomi and Ruth had particularly approached Boaz, there was a possibility that it might not be Boaz. Boaz said that if the nearer kinsman accepted the responsibility, then well and good, he would let him do it. Marriage is a commitment and is best entered into with acceptance, as long as it is lawful and according to God’s ordinance. The kinsman role was not first by preference, but by priority, and so Boaz would yield to the nearer kinsman, and would take up the responsibility only if the nearer kinsman declined his role. Boaz assured Ruth by oath that if it was up to him, he would do the part of the kinsman. Ruth was then requested to remain there for the rest of the night. This request most certainly considered her safety. The morning work was also for her security and happiness. Her duty from then would be to patiently wait for the outcome.

THOUGHT: (Read Psalm 37:7.)

PRAYER: Give me patience, Father, and help me work well with people.

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (15)

When morning came, Boaz had one last charge for Ruth before she left. The charge addressed the nature of the mission before him. Normally, something publicised draws reactions and interests that are varied. Some of the reactions and interests generate work against justice and truth, and seek to hinder God's will. Hence at times, there is a need for confidentiality in matters that can generate interest that may subvert truth and justice.

"...Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor" (Ruth 3:14). Boaz allowed Ruth to lie at his feet till morning, because upon hearing her request, he was convinced that there was no malice or ill intent on her part. He knew that their conversation was also wholesome and edifying, and the request was lawful and according to God's ordinances. But he did not know how others would construe what had happened and how men would spin it. Therefore, just as the Bible exhorts in matters that are optional and not sinful, *"let not then your good be evil spoken of"* (Rom 14:16), he gave Ruth the charge that would help deny opportunity to gainsayers to misinterpret or misconstrue what had happened.

Care had to be taken here to ensure that no falsehood, division or dissimulation was involved. Care also has to be taken to ensure that we cut off any occasion that may bring reproach to the name of Christ, or hinder the will and work of God. Like Samuel finding a way to go and anoint David after the rejection of Saul as king, and ensuring that his concerns were covered, so did Boaz ensure that the just cause of Ruth was not hampered by undue and unfounded suspicion or interference due to the knowledge of her visit to the threshing floor. The instruction of Christ to His disciples gives good wisdom to us: *"be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves"* (Matt 10:16).

THOUGHT: (Read Psalm 112:5 and Proverbs 11:22.)

PRAYER: Grant, Father, that I may maintain discretion and knowledge.

MONDAY, AUGUST 19

RUTH 3:14-18

1 SAMUEL 2:27-36

“...for them that honour me,
I will honour...”

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (16)

If there is a lesson that comes out clearly from the life of Ruth, it must be that God is able to guide and bless. God's providence works for the glory of God and the blessing of His obedient children. Ruth came to put her trust under the wings of the LORD and God did lead, provide and bless her life above what anyone (including Ruth herself) could anticipate, think or ask. Probably as she slept at the feet of Boaz, there might have been some comfort knowing that her request had been accepted and would be attended to in the morning, but what would happen in the morning was unexpected to her.

“...Bring the vail that thou hast upon thee, and hold it...” (Ruth 3:15). The words of Boaz in Ruth 3:14 that called for discretion in view of the fact that there was a nearer kinsman and she could be offered to another, did not hinder his gifting of Ruth with “*six measures of barley*” before she left for the city. Many tried to speculate the purpose of the gift, but the Scripture does not specify. But to the generosity of the gift, the Scripture does point out that Boaz “*laid it on her*” implying that he helped her lift it and got it properly balanced so that she could carry it into the city as she went home.

Ruth willingly took the gift and dutifully went with it home to her mother-in-law. Though she had great hope of what the day would bring, she did not disdain the gift given to her, and she bore the load home probably by carrying it on her head. The picture that the Book of Ruth accords us is that honest labour is nothing to be ashamed of. We see that in Boaz, a mighty man of wealth sleeping out in the threshing floor and personally attending to the matters of his fields and harvest. We then see Ruth, while seeing herself as a poor widow and a stranger, was diligent and committed to gleaning the fields, and yet even after placing a request and having hopes of becoming Mrs Boaz, she still bore the load of six measures and walked with it into the city and home. Honest labour is nothing to be ashamed of, but is to be honoured.

THOUGHT: (Read Hebrews 13:16.)

PRAYER: Father, may we as faithful stewards use Thy gifts to us well.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 20
RUTH 3:14-18
DEUTERONOMY 21:10-22

*“The LORD preserveth the strangers;
he relieveth the fatherless
and widow....”*

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (17)

When Naomi returned to Bethlehem in Ruth chapter 1, her cry was *“call me not Naomi, call me Mara...I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty”* (Ruth 1:20-21). Yet, the one who returned empty, the LORD had filled. Ruth went back home not only with an answer of hope, she also went back bearing six measures of barley. But these great blessings and gifts were not received without agency that God used to bless them, nor without means that Ruth dutifully and responsibly applied herself to perform.

“...And she told her all that the man had done to her” (Ruth 3:16-17). The arrival of Ruth at home was met with a question. And she responded by recounting to her mother-in-law *“all that the man had done to her,”* i.e. what providence had ordained, and what grace had provided, for them. She then went on to add that Boaz had told her: *“Go not empty unto thy mother in law”* (Ruth 3:17). In the Law, God instructed the children of Israel on how to deal with strangers, widows and orphans, as well as warned them against neglecting or mistreating them, reminding them that when the widows and orphans *“cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry”* (Exod 22:23). He also described Himself as one who *“doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger”* (Deut 10:18). And true to His Word, the LORD had by His providence so ordered the steps and ways of Naomi and Ruth such as to fulfil that which He had declared concerning Himself in the Law of Moses, and had said He would do for them in the Law. Indeed, the LORD is *“a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows”* (Ps 68:5). Even though at their return, Naomi thought that the LORD had brought her home again empty, yet providence had so purposed that her emptiness would be filled upon her return to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:6). Ruth, who had refused to return to her people and her gods, and had chosen to follow Naomi and *“come to trust”* in the LORD, shared in the goodness and blessings of the LORD. The LORD had heard and answered their cry.

THOUGHT: (Read Psalm 103:19.)

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, that Thy kindness is inexhaustible.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 21

RUTH 3:14-18

PSALM 46

“Be still, and know that I am God...”

PROVIDENCE, CHOICES, AND FAMILY LIFE (18)

Naomi's advice to Ruth was one that showed great wisdom. The chapter which began with a call to action with instructions and counsel on what to do in the pursuit of “rest,” ended with a call to do probably the most difficult thing that could be asked of anyone: to be still. Yet, this call is a common call to God's people. This is seen from the call of Moses to the children of Israel when standing before the Red Sea, *“Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD”* (Exod 14:13), to Joshua's call to the priests bearing the Ark who were to lead them across the Jordan, *“When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan”* (Josh 3:8).

“Then said she, Sit still, my daughter...” (Ruth 3:18). The call to be still is not, in this case, an admission of helplessness or hopelessness, but rather it is the opposite. It is an expression of faith and confidence that although we had done our part and could do no more, things did not depend upon our action, but rather upon the work of One who works for His glory and our good. It comes from the understanding that there is one who works for us, as Naomi explained to Ruth as she called her to sit still. Naomi said, *“the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.”* This was a testimony to the character and commitment of the kinsman-redeemer. There was nothing more that Ruth could do, but there was no need for her to do any more, as the case and matter had been taken up with one who would be their advocate, to plead their case before the elders of the city. All the actions and activity of Ruth were geared to getting the assistance and advocacy of Boaz, and as she had returned with the assurance from Boaz that he would *“do to thee all that thou requirest,”* she did not need to do any more and indeed could do no more. If Ruth had told Naomi everything that Boaz had said, this would mean that Naomi was confident that Boaz would address even the matter of the nearer kinsman, which she had not thought of as she directed Ruth on what to do. The matter with all its complications and intricacies would be addressed. And, indeed, Boaz did address it such that all their hopes were realised and God was glorified.

THOUGHT: (Read Psalm 103:19.)

PRAYER: Father, increase my trust in Thy providence.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 22

JEREMIAH 15:15-21

EPHESIANS 3:1-12

*“According to the eternal purpose
which he purposed in Christ...”*

THE KINSMAN: A PICTURE OF GRACE AND PROVIDENCE

The Book of Ruth presents the workings of providence in matters of life facing ordinary people. These workings have compassed the decisions and circumstances in life, and have also been reflected in the duties and responsibilities of life. In the kinsman, God's providential working is pictured in the person and character of the redeemer. Apart from God ordaining and giving ordinances that govern the lives of His people, and making available His grace to them, God also providentially leads and governs the lives of His people through their decisions and choices. God is not limited by means. He is able to use circumstances, even those that bring pain and suffering. He is able to use opportunities, even those that are lowly and common, and available to the underprivileged and vulnerable like the gleaning of Ruth, as well as those that are virtuous, and humanly uncommon and limited like the charity and generosity of Boaz.

“...I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the LORD”
(Jer 15:20). In Jeremiah 15:20, we have a reminder that God's grace and providence make provisions for His servants as they seek Him and stay true to Him, walking with Him all the way. However, although grace and providence work for God's children and servants, this does not translate to a carefree, trouble-free or easy life, neither is it a guarantee for a materially and outwardly successful life. Like Jeremiah, some may see little or no outward reward, but God's presence is sufficient to save and deliver all His children out of all their troubles as stated in Psalm 34:19: *“Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.”* God's presence is also sufficient to protect and defend His children and servants against all their enemies. Jeremiah himself, while he was in prison, was instructed by God to pay for the redemption of land for Shallum. We see the work of a kinsman-redeemer in an acted-out prophecy in Jeremiah 32:6-15, which declared that even in the face of impending captivity, Jerusalem would still be inhabited in the future, and the fields and vineyard would once again be sold in the land. This was an expression of faith in the future.

THOUGHT: (Read Jeremiah 32:27 and 33:2-3.)

PRAYER: (Read Jeremiah 32:17-19.)

FRIDAY, AUGUST 23

DEUTERONOMY 6:1-9

PHILIPPIANS 4:12-19

“...I desire fruit that may abound
to your account.”

THE KINSMAN: A PICTURE OF LAW AND LOVE

The kinsman-redeemer is not only a picture of God’s providential workings, he is also a picture of God’s prescribed way for dealing with men among themselves. We have read passages from the Law of Moses which prescribed how the children of Israel were to deal with one another while dwelling in the Land of Promise. God gave them conditions for living in the land, and these conditions also became part of God’s dealings with them in the land. These conditions required obedience to God and through their obedience to God, men would deal with their fellowmen with charity, justice and equity. Boaz, as a law-abiding citizen of the land, dealt graciously and generously with Ruth, who although a poor and vulnerable stranger in the land, had set out to do according to the Law of God in the land, what she was able and allowed for both herself and her mother-in-law. The Law was practical and gave instructions for living, and those who pursued love according to the ordinance and Law of God, were the ones who loved.

“And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deut 6:5). Jesus both affirmed the Law of God, stating that He did not come to abolish it, but to fulfil it (Matt 5:17-18), and summarised the Law as loving God and loving your neighbour (Matt 22:37-40). In practice, Christ also exhorted in the Sermon on the Mount that Christian faithfulness and righteousness have to exceed that of the scribes and the pharisees (Matt 5:20). Boaz, thus, illustrates to us how practical the Law that God gave is, and how adherence to God’s Word and will makes a man a channel of blessing and a vessel unto honour fit for the Master’s use. As the apostle John rightly puts it, *“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith”* (1 John 5:3-4). God’s Law is also God’s guidance and instructions to us on loving God and loving our brother. Moreover, like Boaz, one who obeys God’s Word is able to love and bless his brother.

THOUGHT: (Read 1 John 4:19-21.)

PRAYER: Father, increase my love for Thee, and for my neighbour.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 24

RUTH 4:1-10

ROMANS 12:9-18

“...Provide things honest
in the sight of all men.”

PROVIDENCE, RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE (1)

Marriage is honourable when pursued and entered into lawfully. Many dishonour it by entering into it rashly. Ruth was rightly advised by her mother-in-law to sit still. Many young people try to circumvent the process, deeming it too long. Yet, the Christian wedding ceremony begins with a solemn caution which states, “Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony; which is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men: therefore is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.” In this final chapter of Ruth, we are presented with the picture of Boaz going through the process as Ruth sat still and waited for him to do all that she required (Ruth 3:11).

“Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there...” (Ruth 4:1). The chapter begins with Boaz finding his way to the gate of the city, which was the place where official matters were conducted. The Bible clearly presents this in the Old Testament. The gates were where judgment and punishment were meted out (Deut 17:5), and where matters of controversy were settled (Deut 17:8). Even in matters of marriage, it was at the gates that issues were settled, whether in regard to the Levirate marriage (Deut 25:7), or issues between husband and wife (Deut 22:13-24). The gates of the city were a busy place and the centre of daily activities, for there, the elders of the city came to sit, judge and make decisions. It was at the gate that Absalom placed himself as he sought to usurp David’s throne (2 Sam 15:2). It was also at the gates of the city that Elijah met the widow whom he was sent to by the LORD for his sustenance during the famine (1 Kings 17:10). It was at the gates that the market-place seemed to be as Elisha prophesied that flour and barley would be sold during the famine and the siege of Samaria (2 Kings 7:1). In the Book of Proverbs, it was at the gates that wisdom cried out (Prov 1:21), and the husband of the virtuous woman was known (Prov 31:23). And it was there that Boaz resorted to have the matters at hand addressed.

THOUGHT: (Read Proverbs 11:14.)

PRAYER: Give me wisdom, Father, that I may approach matters godlily.

PROVIDENCE, RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE (2)

Boaz chose the ideal place for the business at hand. He chose the gate, the place where public business was conducted. This implies that though marriage is between two persons, a man and a woman, marriage is a public and social event that is to be witnessed and endorsed in the presence of others. No wonder the solemn charge at the beginning of a Christian wedding states that "we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company." The process Boaz was embarking on was a public one, and so he sat in a public place and awaited the arrival of those concerned.

"...Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here..." (Ruth 4:1). The nearer kin was asked to turn aside and attend to the matters at hand, and the elders were called as witnesses. The nearer kinsman was not identified by name. Concerning this, Lange makes an insightful remark when he states that "even supposing that the narrator omitted the name merely because he did not know it, it remains none the less an instructive fact that he who was so anxious for the preservation of his own inheritance, is now not even known by name." Indeed, true to what Christ said in Matthew 16:25, such a one who did not want to mar his lineage is not known by name, yet the names of Boaz and of Ruth are household names.

"And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here..." (Ruth 4:2). After calling the nearer kinsman, Boaz then gathered a group of elders to validate the contract that would be made that morning. According to Jethro's advice to Moses in Exodus 18, the elders of a particular city exercised jurisdiction in that city. Likewise, Deuteronomy shows that the role was given to "the elders of that city" (Deut 21:3, 4, 6; 22:18) and "the elders of his city" (Deut 19:12; 21:19, 20; 25:8). With the kinsman seated and the elders witnessing, Boaz could then begin to address the matter and the requests placed by Ruth at the threshing floor. A matter would be settled well when addressed at its rightful place.

THOUGHT: (Read Proverbs 16:20.)

PRAYER: Father, may I do all correctly, bringing honour to Thy name.

MONDAY, AUGUST 26
RUTH 4:1-10
LEVITICUS 25:23-25

*“The land shall not
be sold for ever:
for the land is mine...”*

PROVIDENCE, RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE (3)

The council of elders and the nearer kinsman having been successfully gathered, Boaz then addressed the kinsman in the presence of the witnesses. He approached his errand with wisdom and, in the process, offered the nearer kinsman the opportunity to be the redeemer and to perform the duty of the kinsman-redeemer. He advertised the property of Elimelech that Naomi was selling.

“...Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land...” (Ruth 4:3). Issues of land and property among family members are often emotive and hotly contested. But this ought not to be always so. Boaz advertised the property as *“our brother Elimelech’s”* but as under the management and authority of Naomi. This has caused many commentators to ask how Naomi came to possess the land, why she and Ruth lived in poverty with Ruth having to glean for a living if she possessed land. From the Old Testament law, the land belonged to the LORD and it was He who allotted it to the families of Israel. It is from this that the laws of Levirate marriage, the laws of release and the year of Jubilee find basis. Therefore, the important thing here was the continuation of the name of the family of Elimelech, and that was where the work of the kinsman-redeemer came into play. He would not only buy the property for the property’s sake, but, he would buy the property and raise up a seed for the deceased brother. That was why when the nearer kinsman was willing to redeem the land, Boaz introduced the marriage of Ruth, wife of the deceased.

“If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know” (Ruth 4:4). The matter of the land of Elimelech did not become a matter that generated controversy or dispute because of the approach taken, and wisdom used, by Boaz. Property matters become heated because of selfish interest. Boaz approached it from the perspective and provisions of the Law of God. What was important to him was not getting more land, but fulfilling God’s will.

THOUGHT: (Read 1 Timothy 6:6-8.)

PRAYER: Father, may my affections be on Christ and things above.

PROVIDENCE, RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE (4)

As Boaz advertised the parcel of land that Naomi was selling to the nearer kin, he not only informed him about the sale and the kinsman's priority in redeeming the land, he also clearly stated his desire and intent to redeem it if the nearer kinsman did not wish to do so. There is nothing wrong with having interest in matters that are lawful. It is good to have desires, but it is important to handle matters properly and be careful to control our desires and ambitions. In his addressing of the nearer kin, he did not withhold or distort the facts, and all was done in the presence of the elders of the city as witnesses.

“...And he said, I will redeem it” (Ruth 4:4). The initial response of the nearer kin upon hearing the matter was one of willingness to redeem the land. But his response was one that was not well thought out. He had not considered all the requirements of the law and his desire was not governed by God's will and law. How often, like this man, do we jump to conclusions and make decisions on matters of life, relationships and marriage, thinking only of the temporal and temporary good? Once the decision is made, the consequences must be borne. Therefore it is important that the decisions we make are not rash ones, but are well thought out and weighed, and done with full knowledge and willingness to bear the consequences that come with it.

“...thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance” (Ruth 4:5). Another lesson we may draw from this is: just because the law permits and allows us something, it does not mean we must do it. This is especially so in marriage and relationships. Just because marriage is honourable and is instituted by God, does not mean every person must marry or be married. Every man has his gift from God, and marriage comes with responsibilities. You cannot choose to marry and reject the duties, roles, and responsibilities that come with marriage. The kinsman could not choose to redeem the land and not raise up a seed for the dead brother.

THOUGHT: Duties cannot be fulfilled in part, but fully.

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to embrace my roles fully and joyfully.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 28

RUTH 4:1-10

1 CORINTHIANS 7:25-40

“...he that is married

careth for the things

...how he may please his wife.”

PROVIDENCE, RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE (5)

As the nearer kinsman learned of what was involved, and what was meant, in the choice he was called to make, he had a change of mind and withdrew his offer. This in part also presented to us the purpose of premarital counselling. Many a time, premarital counselling is considered a tool to help couples understand one another and develop healthy patterns for their coming marital union. This is only one side of it. The other side is that it must also help the couple seeking to enter into a marital relationship know what they are entering into, and re-evaluate their intents and their calling. Thus, there is still room for the relationship to be dissolved and the wedding to be called off during the process of premarital counselling.

“...I cannot redeem it for myself...” (Ruth 4:6). The kinsman, upon knowing what was involved in the decision, changed his mind. He had his reasons for wanting the property belonging to Naomi, but his reasons were not aligned with God’s will in the redemption of property. No property could be permanently sold, for all property had to be returned to its original owners in the year of Jubilee. In order for the property to be returned to Elimelech in the future, there had to be a son raised up for the dead. This was a price that the kinsman was not willing to pay. The good part was that he did the honourable thing by reviewing his offer before declining to redeem the property. No one should enter into marriage without serious consideration and counsel. This applies not only to the young men and ladies, but also to the widows and widowers. Marriage must not be for material gain and prosperity, and one must not go into it considering only what they may get out of the marriage. Rather, it must be a consideration of what their roles, duties and responsibilities will be. One who is not ready to be a husband and a father or take up the duties of a husband and a father, is not ready for marriage and should not seek a relationship with any woman. Similarly, the same applies to every woman. Once you choose to marry or be married, you have no choice but to fulfil the duties, roles and obligations of the married.

THOUGHT: (Read Ephesians 5:33.)

PRAYER: Father, give me grace to abide in Thy will for my life.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 29

RUTH 4:1-10

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4

“...they tempted and provoked
the most high God...”

PROVIDENCE, RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE (6)

Prudent decisions can save one from many sins and snares. All seeking to enter into marriage ought to be diligent and careful to examine themselves and make the right and godly choice, in accordance with God’s will for their lives. The nearer kinsman deferred his right to Boaz, and Boaz took it up joyfully and willingly.

“...redeem thou my right to thyself...” (Ruth 4:6). Although the kinsman was not willing to marry Ruth, he did not oppose Boaz nor hinder Ruth’s marriage to Boaz. This may be key to relationships among brethren that is lost today. Selfishness reigns so much so that someone is willing to destroy everything intentionally, claiming “if I cannot have it, then no one should.” People are inclined to hoarding things that they do not use and, in the process, deprive others of opportunity to use them. People also disregard common courtesy and ignore the good of others by showing heartless indifference, holding on to things that would be more profitable to others than to them, like giving up a seat to someone else who may need it more than they would.

In relationships, selfishness is seen in many young men and women, who enter into relationships without intent of marriage, and get others attached to them, use and abuse them, as well as hinder them from marrying other persons, and depriving them of security and happiness in life. “Nothing can be a greater indication of a selfish and grovelling mind, than for a man to work himself into the affections of a young woman so far as to hinder her from listening to the addresses of others, whilst he is balancing in his own mind whether he will marry her or not, and behaves in such a dubious manner, that expectations are raised, whilst positive engagements are avoided. Let all young women guard against such insidious enemies of their peace. A man cannot be truly in love with a woman, when his self-love is so strong, that he attends only to his own comfort and interest, and cares not what pain he inflicts upon her to whom he pretends a regard.”

THOUGHT: Increase in selfishness is a sign that we are in the last days.

PRAYER: Give me grace, Father, to overcome selfishness.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 30

RUTH 4:1-10

DEUTERONOMY 25:7-10

“...his brother’s wife come unto him
...loose his shoe from off his foot...”

PROVIDENCE, RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE (7)

The account of the legal process that was taking place at the gate of the city was interrupted in order to give an explanation of a custom of the period. This probably indicates that even at the time of the writing of the Book of Ruth, the custom explained was no longer in practice. This is seen in the phrase “*this was the manner in former time in Israel*” (Ruth 4:7). This ceremony seemed to be related, but was different in practice to that which was set in the Law of Moses. In this custom, the kinsman who was unwilling to perform the duty of the redeemer, was to take off his shoe and give it to Boaz. In the Law of Moses, it was the widow who remove the shoe, and spat on his face.

“...and this was a testimony in Israel” (Ruth 4:7). The act described here seemed to be not only distinct from the one in Deuteronomy in performance, it seemed to be distinct in effect too. In Deuteronomy, it was presented as an act of contempt on the widow’s part by which she reproached the man who refused to marry her and raise up a seed for his brother. Here in the Book of Ruth, as the nearer kinsman removed his shoe and handed it over to Boaz, it was as if he was transferring or ceding his rights for redeeming the property and with it, marrying Ruth to Boaz, especially when the kinsman said to Boaz, “*redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it*” (Ruth 4:6). What may not be very clear to us, since it is a custom of a different time and people, is the significance of the shoe in all these. Was the shoe in the possession of the widow (in the case of Deuteronomy 25) and in this verse, the possession of Boaz, a token of the evidence of holding the property rights? The writer did, however, point out that “*this was a testimony in Israel.*” It is important to highlight the distinction between what was given in the Law of Moses and what was happening here. There was no widow at the gate. It was between two brothers, though the matter concerned their dead brother and his widow. There was no mention of another kinsman in Deuteronomy. Here in the Book of Ruth, Ruth went to Boaz, not knowing there was another kinsman, and Boaz got the rights instead.

THOUGHT: Negligence of duty brings shame, while being responsible brings blessings.

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to be responsible and to order my life well.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 31

RUTH 4:1-10

ROMANS 8:25-30

“...all things work together for good
to them that love God...”

PROVIDENCE, RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE (8)

The nearer kinsman declined to act, and relinquished all his rights and claims to Naomi, her property and Ruth. The hand of providence not only worked in bringing Boaz and Ruth together, but also in giving Boaz the legal right and permission to marry Ruth. Many a time, those who are in love fight against circumstances and people, seeing them as obstacles and hindrances to their profession of love and desire to marry. But not Boaz. He did not try to circumvent any legal and lawful requirement. He actively pursued them, and they worked for him, not against him.

“...Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe” (Ruth 4:8). Those who believe in God and His sovereignty, and His providence, must trust that all things will work together for good. Boaz had promised Ruth that he would do all that she requested, yet he did not know how things would turn out. He knew that the nearer kinsman would either take up the responsibility or reject it. Boaz’s desire preceded neither God’s will nor his obedience and submission to God’s law and will. This is a hard but necessary lesson for all to learn, especially those who have set their minds on a would-be spouse. She or he may, in your own eyes, be the best person for you, and you may think of stopping at nothing to marry that person. But what is God’s will for you, and for your would-be spouse? The temptation to circumvent or fight against laid-down processes and procedures, especially those that are drawn and based on biblical injunctions and principles, is a temptation to stray from God and His will for you and for your would-be spouse.

Boaz obtained the legal and lawful rights to redeem the property of Naomi and to marry Ruth, not by fighting the lawful principles and legal procedures, but by submitting himself to the processes and actively pursuing them. He did not ignore the law and follow his heart. He obeyed the law, willing to accept whatever the outcome was. He let God lead, and providence worked for him.

THOUGHT: No one succeeds by fighting God’s will.

PRAYER: Father, give me grace and wisdom to seek and follow Thy will.

LORD'S DAY, SEPTEMBER 1
RUTH 4:1-10
MATTHEW 16:14-26

*"...and whosoever will
lose his life for my sake
shall find it."*

PROVIDENCE, RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE (9)

The nearer kinsman was afraid to "mar" his inheritance, but not Boaz. When Boaz was offered the opportunity to redeem Elimelech's property and marry Ruth, he did not hesitate, neither did he bargain or seek for any concession. He called upon the elders and the people to be witnesses as he made a formal declaration to fulfil the conditions that the nearer kinsman declined as he accepted the shoe presented to him.

"...Ye are witnesses this day..." (Ruth 4:9-10). This phrase is repeated twice, in verse 9 and at the end of verse 10. As a good man, Boaz, apart from showing virtues of benevolence and generosity, also showed that he was careful to maintain his cause and reputation in judgment. The character and property of many a good man have been lost because of entering into shady and unwarranted deals. In life, there will be conmen and those who would seek to take advantage of the benevolence and generosity of others. There are also those who seek to tarnish the reputation and good name of others. In light of this, discretion in dealings is vital to everyone. Above board and open dealings are a security to those who engage in such, while secret and under-the-table dealings become a snare to those who engage in it. Boaz's character and sacrifice were established because everything was done in the presence of witnesses. Nothing could be distorted or denied.

"...I have bought all that was Elimelech's and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's..." (Ruth 4:9). The statement of Boaz was one that was very sobering, especially in light of the nearer kinsman's refusal. The reason he gave was about protecting his inheritance, yet they were talking of the inheritance of their deceased brother. Psalm 39:6 presents man's life as a dream during which one gathers possessions, yet, he is not in control as to whose hands they will fall into after his death. Boaz, on the other hand, seemed to be doing that which was considered wasting and endangering his inheritance while securing his dead brother's lineage and name. Yet, it was he who was making the right choice.

THOUGHT: (Read Psalm 39:6.)

PRAYER: Grant me, Father, grace and discretion in dealings with others.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 2

RUTH 4:1-10

PROVERBS 31:10-31

*“Who can find a virtuous woman?
for her price is far above rubies.”*

PROVIDENCE, RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE (10)

The declaration Boaz made in the presence of witnesses acknowledged and identified Ruth the Moabitess as his wife. He was not ashamed to mention her by name or by her ancestry. Yet, in marrying her, he had not gone against the law of God. This was not an unequal yoke, for he knew well that she had come to trust in, and find refuge under the wings of the LORD. The marriage also was sanctioned by the provisions of the Levirate marriage.

“...Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife...” (Ruth 4:10). The declaration was one of acceptance of responsibility. It was also a declaration of principles and spiritual values of life. His boldness and confidence were not based on the future, which was still unknown to both Boaz and Ruth then, but was rather based on obedience to God’s Word and will as revealed in the Law. How any marriage will turn out is a mystery, and no one enters into marriage determined to make their lives and that of their spouses a nightmare. But many hopes have been dashed, and the increasing rate of divorce points to the uncertainty of the future. Boldness and confidence must, therefore, be placed on the spiritual principles and values used in choosing one’s spouse and in the process of acquiring and formalising the marriage. Boaz was confident because he had considered spiritual values and he had done what the law of God has instructed.

The purchase of Ruth to be his wife also pointed to the value Boaz had placed on her. As Proverbs points out, the value of a virtuous woman is *“far above rubies”* (Prov 31:10). Boaz had referred to Ruth as a virtuous woman in Ruth 3:11, and had agreed to do all that she requested based on that. All that he would do and spend in fulfilling all the requirements of the law would not be regretted because of the value of the woman he had espoused to be his wife. *“Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised”* (Prov 31:30). Boaz, having found such a woman, gladly fulfilled all responsibilities.

THOUGHT: Virtue adds value to life. Seeking virtue never brings loss.

PRAYER: Father, may I always be guided by Thy Word.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

RUTH 4:1-10

EPHESIANS 5:21-29

*“Submitting yourselves
one to another
in the fear of God.”*

PROVIDENCE, RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE (11)

Marriage entails much. Boaz, in making his choice, considered not only the character and virtue of Ruth, but also the burden and responsibilities he was to bear. In his interactions with Ruth beginning at Ruth chapter 2, he had repeatedly acknowledged her virtue and spirituality, which is an important consideration in marriage. Here in Ruth chapter 4, he publicly proclaimed and acknowledged his responsibility as he took on the duty of the kinsman-redeemer.

“...to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance...” (Ruth 4:10).

The man, who enters into a relationship not prepared to take up the responsibilities and duties that come with the relationship, is one who sets himself up for misery and heartache. Though Boaz had the opportunity to marry Ruth whom he had held in high regard, he was conscious that there was a duty to be performed before God. Though he anticipated a happy life with her, his happiness was not the only factor or motive in marrying Ruth, neither was he motivated by the amassing of wealth by adding to himself the property that belonged to Elimelech. He made known to the witnesses that he was conscious of the responsibilities and duties placed upon him by the Law of God, and he was willing to accomplish all that God had set forth for him by virtue of being the kinsman-redeemer.

Many marriages which struggle, and relationships which falter, have one indicative factor in common: spouses who are not doing their part, and are not ready to do their part before their spouses do their part. The common complaint at many counselling sessions is: “How does he expect me to obey him when he does not love me. Let him love me first, then I will obey.” And the spouse would respond: “How do you love someone who does not respect you? If she wants me to love her then she should respect and submit to me.” When Boaz spoke before the elders, he did not speak of what Ruth was to do, but rather testified of the duty he bore and spoke of his resolve to do his part.

THOUGHT: When I believe God’s Word, I focus on my duty.

PRAYER: Give me grace, Father, to use Thy Word to assess myself.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4

RUTH 4:1-10

HEBREWS 11:1-13

“...ye are witnesses this day.”

THE CONFIDENCE OF FAITH

The boldness and confidence with which Boaz spoke is amazing, considering the uncertainty of life and the frailty of man. We make plans and dream dreams, only to either change them as we make adjustments in life due to unforeseen and unavoidable circumstances, or drop them altogether and go back to the drawing board to make new plans due to human failure or weaknesses that render our plans and dreams impractical or impossible to achieve.

“...ye are witnesses this day” (Ruth 4:10). When we consider God’s design, Word and principles in regard to marriage and relationships, and the individual’s roles and duties in them, we realise that none of the roles and duties are exclusive or complete by themselves, and marriage cannot be established by the efforts and commitment of one spouse alone. The teachings on the roles of the members of the family in Scripture, be they of husbands, wives, parents, or children, show that they are complementary roles. None is complete without the other, and each works better and more easily and bears more fruit as the other works too. It is easier for the wife to submit when the husband is loving and vice versa. Thus, as Boaz spoke of what his role was as a kinsman-redeemer and said, *“...have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place...”* (Ruth 4:10), one may be tempted to ask: “How do you know for sure that you will accomplish what you are setting out to do? Is it all up to you?” However, Boaz was speaking by faith. His role was to do God’s will and fulfil his God-given responsibility, and God would fulfil His Word and accomplish His plan. Boaz believed God would accomplish His Word, and therefore his part was to focus on obeying God and doing what God had instructed in His Word. As he said to Ruth at the threshing floor, *“...if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do...”* (Ruth 3:13), that was submission to God’s will. In Ruth 4:10, Boaz’s focus was on what God had laid out in His Word for the kinsman to do, and that was commitment and faith. He was given the rights to redeem, so it was God’s will for him to do so.

THOUGHT: Confidence of faith is acted out in responsible obedience.

PRAYER: Father, give me grace to discern and obey Thy will.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

RUTH 4:11-22

MALACHI 2:13-16

“...the LORD hath been
witness between thee
and the wife of thy youth...”

THE BLESSING OF THE HOME (1)

This final scene in the book of Ruth presents to us the necessity of not only entering into marriage lawfully, but also entering into it publicly. Christian weddings take place in the church and in the presence of God's people as witnesses for the blessing of the home. It was Boaz who called the people at the gate of the city that morning, and placed before them a matter that many in this age would consider a private matter as it involved and concerned the lives of Boaz, Ruth and the nearer kinsman alone. It seemed to be a family matter.

“And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses...” (Ruth 4:11). The first part of Ruth chapter 4 had only Boaz and the nearer kinsman speaking. Verse 11 begins with the response of “all the people that were in the gate, and the elders.” Recall that, according to verse 2, Boaz had called and chosen only “ten men of the elders of the city.” Therefore, it must mean that by the time the matter was settled, there was a larger gathering than that which was assembled at the beginning of the matter. Public knowledge of certain matters makes men more careful in their dealings. One may be more easily conned into buying a land or property when the ownership is not known as compared to that whose owners are known to all. Similarly, a secret engagement or betrothal leaves room for licentious living, and one may have multiple partners if it is not known that one is already in a relationship. Boaz did apply discretion when it was needed and said, “...Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor” (Ruth 3:14), but he laid the matter before the elders in the hearing of the people when it was necessary. The legality of Boaz's possession of Elimelech's property and of his marriage to Ruth was publicly established and would not be subject to questioning from that time forward, because there were witnesses who would testify that he acted honourably and pursued all things lawfully. Integrity is achieved and established by the processes and steps that one takes in doing things. Determination to do that which is lawful and right, coupled with wisdom and discretion to involve those who need to be involved, help set forth the integrity of a man.

THOUGHT: (Read Proverbs 10:9.)

PRAYER: Father, grant that I may walk in integrity.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

RUTH 4:11-22

GENESIS 1:26-29

“And God blessed them...”

THE BLESSING OF THE HOME (2)

The legal session and the matters of rights to the property of Naomi and marriage of Ruth ended with a statement affirming and acknowledging Boaz's statement that there were witnesses, and a pronouncement of blessing on the Levirate marriage of Boaz to Ruth. The assessment of the people present and also those who had followed the morning's proceedings was that Boaz had done what was lawful and right. And their prayers on his behalf indicated that.

“...The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah...” (Ruth 4:11). In Ruth 1:19, when Naomi returned, some of the people who knew the history of the family of Elimelech, probably had grieved at the apparent end of the lineage with the arrival of the two widows. But then, as the proceedings ended that day at the gate, they had joys and hopes rising as the turn of events unfolded that morning. The lineage that seemed to have come to an end now seemed to have a fresh start. They had witnessed hope rising and called upon the LORD'S blessing, praying that the LORD would make Ruth fruitful. Christian weddings are a public event not only for a witness and for the legal papers, but also for spiritual blessings.

Public witness is part of the marriage process for a testimony to the lawfulness and “rightness” of the union. For this reason, there is the call during the wedding ceremony for any person who may “know cause, or just impediment” to prevent the marriage, to come forth prior to the wedding proceeding. And if no one speaks up publicly, he is charged to “hereafter, forever hold his peace.” This implies that the approval of the body of Christ in the union of a man and a woman is necessary and essential. This means that a couple who is not willing to listen, but is wilful and headstrong, and enter into marriage ignoring the counsel of the church, and godly and spiritual elders and parents, will deprive themselves of blessings and spiritual support that would buttress the marriage in hard times.

THOUGHT: Christian witness supports us as we keep our vows.

PRAYER: Grant us, Father, fellowship that strengthens families.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7
RUTH 4:11-22
LEVITICUS 26:1-13

“...I will have respect unto you,
and make you fruitful,
and multiply you...”

THE BLESSING OF THE HOME (3)

Christian weddings are a public event not only for a witness and for the legal papers, but also for spiritual blessings. The public witness not only gives a testimony of approval and a witness that buttresses the marriage in the storms of life through prayers, fellowship, counsel and reminders during hard times, it also provides for spiritual blessings and support during the wedding and after in the course of the marriage.

“...The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah...” (Ruth 4:11). The prayer of blessing given at weddings, with the congregation joining in spirit and heart and with a chorus of amen, not only gives encouragement to the couple, but also offers a platform for holding them accountable to their obligations, their roles, duties and vows.

The second value of the public witness in a Christian wedding is the blessings it bestows. These blessings are based on the Word and promises of God, as well as the testimony and example of those who receive them. The elders, in their blessings, referred to their history and God’s Word when they prayed that the LORD would bless Ruth and make her “*like Rachel and like Leah*.” Both Rachel and Leah were at different times “remembered” by the LORD and blessed with fruit of the womb. For Leah, the Bible records, “*And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived, and bare Jacob the fifth son*” (Gen 30:17), while for Rachel, the Bible states, “*And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb*” (Gen 30:22). For both of them, the testimony is clear: “*children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward*” (Ps 127:3). Leah and Rachel were the mothers of Israel, not by power, might or nature, but by the blessing of the LORD. The psalm says the fruit of the womb is His reward, and as Jacob acknowledged “*which God hath graciously given thy servant*” (Gen 33:5). Rachel was probably mentioned first because her grave was with them (Gen 35:19).

THOUGHT: Christian witness comes with a blessing on the home.

PRAYER: O, Father, give us homes built firmly on the Saviour!

LORD'S DAY, SEPTEMBER 8

RUTH 4:11-22

PROVERBS 11:16-28

“...to him that soweth righteousness
shall be a sure reward.”

THE BLESSING OF THE HOME (4)

Christian weddings are public events. In them, we have both the witness of the blessings pronounced on the couple and the vows of commitment taken by the couple. No one can seek and enjoy the blessings of marriage without one's commitment to it. The prayers, counsel and support of the church family help where commitment is.

“...which two did build the house of Israel...” (Ruth 4:11). The intent of Boaz was *“to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance”* (Ruth 4:10) and the blessing pronounced was corresponding to it, i.e. his wife Ruth may be like the two women which *“did build the house of Israel.”* Leah and Rachel bore the twelve sons of Jacob who became the twelve tribes of Israel. They laid the foundations for the multitude who then inhabited the land. As God had used them and blessed them, their prayer was that He may do so to Ruth too. Good works and acts of piety and charity come with a reward. When Boaz chose that which his brother and nearer kinsman thought would mar his inheritance, God did not mar his inheritance, rather, He established it. God, in the workings of providence, has established principles that reward piety and charity. Similarly, marriages and other Christian relationships are destroyed by selfishness, or blessed by selflessness.

“...and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem” (Ruth 4:11). The blessing started with *“the LORD make the woman.”* It then proceeded to Boaz himself. Boaz had desired to fulfil God's will and plan, and to raise a name for Elimelech just as God had instructed. For him, the blessing was that he prospered in righteousness. And as the psalmist said, *“those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing”* (Ps 92:13-14), so the elders wished Boaz an increase in grace, comfort, and blessedness that he might accomplish much and have the strength and vitality undiminished to bear much fruit for the LORD.

THOUGHT: (Read Proverbs 10:22.)

PRAYER: O, Father, be Thou my sufficiency and joy in my home.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

RUTH 4:11-22

2 SAMUEL 7:4-12

“...the LORD telleth thee that he
will make thee an house.”

THE BLESSING OF THE HOME (5)

The Christian wedding and the vows are not just formality. They are to be entered into very soberly. When one chooses to have a Christian wedding and recite those wedding vows, it must be with the intent and purpose to live a Christian life and build a godly home! The blessings that follow, and that are laid in store for the Christian home, are not automatically bestowed on the basis of going through and having a Christian wedding. Rather, they are bestowed on those who seek and actively pursue a godly Christian life.

“And let thy house be like the house of Pharez...” (Ruth 4:12). Boaz had spoken of the name and lineage of Elimelech, and the blessings pronounced on him spoke of his house. Just as David sat in his house and purposed to build a house for the LORD, so did Boaz, addressing the elders at the gate, purpose to raise up seed for the dead. Unlike Er who was wicked, and Onan who refused to give seed to his brother, and were both slain of the LORD, Boaz willingly took up the responsibility of the kinsman-redeemer and was blessed for it.

The blessing “*like the house of Pharez*” was one that included honour and dignity, as well as numbers and multitude. Out of the five sons born to Judah, two died at the hands of the LORD for their wickedness. This means that the whole tribe of Judah would trace their ancestry to either Shelah, Pharez or Zerah (Gen 46:12). Not much is known to us about the house of Pharez. What is recorded for us, and is known, is mainly based on the circumstances of his birth. Just like in the case of Ruth, Tamar was widowed and left without a son, and was to be a Levirate bride. But as Judah’s youngest son Shelah was too young, Tamar was sent home with a promise to be given to Shelah when he matured, a promise that Judah did not intend to keep. Tamar conceived and gave birth to twin boys by Judah, and at birth, Pharez broke out first when his brother pulled his hand back (Gen 38:29), and by that, held on to the rights of the firstborn child over his brother Zerah.

THOUGHT: “Singing if my way be clear, praying if the path be drear.”

PRAYER: O, Father, behold us at Thy feet, a needy, sinful band.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

RUTH 4:11-22

ECCLESIASTES 5:1-6

*“When thou vowest a vow unto God,
defer not to pay it...”*

THE BLESSING OF THE HOME (6)

The story of the relationship of Boaz and Ruth is not one of empty promises, sweet lies, words spoken hastily, or out of emotions without intentions or with wrong intentions. In this age, courtship and speech between “lovers” are presented as lies that are sweet to the ears, and words that are to be forgotten and not to be fulfilled. But this was not the case of Boaz with Ruth.

“So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife...” (Ruth 4:13). The purposes and the words of Boaz were not driven by emotions or said out of convenience. When he offered to take up the matter with the elders on her behalf, he did take it up when morning came. When he said he would do the part of the kinsman if the nearer kinsman would not do it, he kept his word and took Ruth to be his wife. No doubt, if the nearer kinsman had stepped up to the responsibility, then Boaz, as he had said to Ruth, would have let the nearer kinsman redeem her and Naomi’s property. Many marriages become difficult and homes become unhappy because the pictures painted during courtship through the words and promises given were rash and empty. We court and “convince” one another with words we do not intend to remember, and promises we do not intend to keep. Yet, the one who is convinced by them remembers them.

Vows made must be fulfilled, and the disposition when fulfilling them must be joyful, willing and cheerful. Therefore, whether it is during the process of courting, or during the wedding ceremony, our words must be sober, deliberate, and conscious. We must say them with the intent and purpose to fulfil them, not just say what we know is expected of us, even though we do not mean them. The “for better, for worse” and “in sickness and in health,” or “for richer, for poorer” and “till death us do part” are not sweet nothings that sound good and poetic to the ears, or that are for a good public show. They are words of resolve, intent and purpose that are said not just for the hearing or the moment, but said for a witness and are words to which we desire to be held accountable to.

THOUGHT: Marriage vows are not empty promises.

PRAYER: (Read Psalm 19:12-14.)

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

RUTH 4:11-22

1 PETER 3:9-12

“...knowing that ye
are thereunto called,
that ye should inherit a blessing.”

THE BLESSING OF THE HOME (7)

Prayer too is not to be taken as a formality. In prayer, we commune with God who hears and is pleased to answer our prayer. Both private and secret prayers, as well as corporate and public prayers, have immense value for personal family life. Just as the words of Boaz to Ruth, and to the elders and the people, were not empty promises, the words of blessing pronounced on Boaz and Ruth by the elders were not empty blessings.

“The LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son” (Ruth 4:13). The pronouncements and prayers that blessed Boaz and Ruth had the name of the LORD invoked. His name was not invoked in vain. In the Ten Commandments, God commanded that His name must not be taken in vain. What joy Ruth must have felt. Surely, none can imagine. She had been a wife before, her husband had died, and at the point of coming with Naomi to Bethlehemjudah, the picture presented was bleak. She came under no illusion; she came trusting only in God. And then, she was married again, to a godly man too. And *“the LORD gave her conception.”* She would be a mother for the first time as the provisions for Levirate marriage applied where there was no child born.

The picture presented here is an encouraging one. It is one that offers to us an encouragement to pray. It is one that implies that we have a privilege in prayer. We may come to God with a confidence that is solely based on the attributes and Word of God, irrespective of past experiences because God graciously gives help to those in need. It also offers us an encouragement to obey. It is a picture that shows us that God does honour obedience and commitment to His will as revealed in His Word. The words of Naomi to Ruth that same morning recorded at the end of chapter 3 (*“Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day”*) were realised, the intentions of Boaz were honoured, and the prayers of the elders were answered.

THOUGHT: (Read 1 John 5:14-15.)

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to trust Thy goodness in all that Thou wilt.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12
RUTH 4:11-22
DEUTERONOMY 6:17-25

“...fear the LORD our God,
for our good always, that
he might preserve us...”

THE BLESSING OF THE HOME (8)

God is always at work, even when man does not see His hand at work or understand the workings of providence. Despite the nature of the events at hand and how they seem to the naked eye, God is at work accomplishing His sovereign and divine purposes. The lessons of life's circumstances were supposed to be lessons on theology for the children of Israel. Through them, they were to instruct their children on the sovereignty, faithfulness, mercy, power, goodness, justice and other attributes of God.

“Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman” (Ruth 4:14). The birth of a son to Boaz and Ruth brought the women of Bethlehem to Naomi. She, who at the beginning thought and asked “*why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?*” as they left Moab for Bethlehem in Ruth 1:11, and who also at the point of entering Bethlehem responded to the question “*is this Naomi?*” with the answer “*call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me*” in Ruth 1:20, then had a clearer vision of the workings of God through His hand of providence. To her, the women now say “*the LORD... hath not left thee this day without a kinsman.*” This was a response of joy and gladness. The birth of a son to Ruth brought joy and gladness to all.

We also learn another lesson which Christ gave to the disciples in John 16, which is a lesson that is drawn from the nature and state of a woman at childbirth that presents to us the nature of man. At the fall, God said to Eve, “*I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children*” (Gen 3:16). Christ went on to say that “*as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world*” (John 16:21). Naomi's sorrows were all forgotten for God's grace and mercy were then clearly revealed. The past will not change, and history is fixed, but the clarity of God's grace brings sense to what seemed senseless.

THOUGHT: The Christian testimony is like the light needed in darkness.
PRAYER: Pain may blind my view, but grant the light of Thy grace.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13
RUTH 4:11-22
1 CHRONICLES 16:23-34

*“O give thanks unto the LORD;
for he is good;
for his mercy endureth for ever.”*

THE BLESSING OF THE HOME (9)

One of the attributes of God is His goodness. One phrase that has become a cliché in many circles today is: “God is good all the time.” Although as one goes through the Book of Ruth and considers the providence of God, the goodness of God becomes clearer and clearer, yet it is here in this section that we find an open declaration from the women of the city to Naomi in this respect. There was interest showed by them at the return of Naomi, and then it was seen again at the birth of a son to Ruth.

“And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD...” (Ruth 4:14). Their message to Naomi was one of thankfulness and gratitude to God. The story of Ruth, until this final scene, had focused on the activity of men. But human activity had been under the umbrella of God’s sovereignty. From Ruth going out to glean, to Naomi instructing her to go to the threshing floor; and from Boaz going out into his fields, to Boaz calling the elders to the city gate. What seemed like random acts now clearly showed the hand that had been hitherto at work, yet unseen. *“Blessed be the LORD”* was the response of the women when the hand of providence became clear and visible. Whatever efforts and progress men make, whatever joys and results our actions bring, whatever ends and outcomes we achieve, all praise and glory must be to the LORD. The women understood this, and their response was not: “You are fortunate your son married Ruth.” Or: “You are fortunate to have a daughter-in-law like Ruth, and to have a kinsman like Boaz.” Nothing was attributed to the events and people around Naomi, but rather and rightly so, all was attributed directly to the LORD, who was pleased to use the persons and events for His glory. The diligence of Ruth, the goodwill of Boaz, the counsel of Naomi, or any other part played by any other person was to be considered and evaluated under the goodness of God, and was reason for blessing God for His goodness. When the nearest kinsman forfeited his rights, God was still at work. May we too learn to look beyond the men used by God and trust in God’s unending and unfailing goodness to us.

THOUGHT: (Read Jeremiah 9:23-24.)

PRAYER: Forgive me, Father, for my focus on men. Turn my eyes on Jesus.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14
RUTH 4:11-22
PROVERBS 20:5-12

*“Most men will proclaim
every one his own goodness:
but a faithful man who can find?”*

THE BLESSING OF THE HOME (10)

Many a time we profess religion but, alas, we fail to show true religion. We proclaim our faith, but fail to show it. James, in his epistle, presented the practicality of religion and pointed out that one who hears but does not do is deceiving himself. The harmony of verbal profession and actual action is very necessary, yet very rare. We often struggle to be in deed as we speak in word, yet that is the essence of Christianity, as the apostle puts it: *“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth”* (1 John 3:18). Boaz, as a man walking in his integrity, was once again blessed and *“his children are blessed after him.”*

“...his name may be famous in Israel” (Ruth 4:14). The noble acts of Boaz set him up as an example of piety, goodwill, charity and selflessness. But it did not end there, for Ruth had given Naomi a son, one who would inherit the name and the property of Elimelech (Naomi’s husband). It is the birth of this child that brought the women to Naomi. How would this child turn out? What would he accomplish in his life? Many a child hold the aspirations and dreams of their parents from a young age, unbeknownst to them. This son of Boaz was raised on behalf of Mahlon, and as such, legally he would be grandson to Naomi even though Naomi was not directly part of Boaz’s family. Once the child became of age, he would bear the responsibility and name of Elimelech. The name that he would establish was a name that many had thought was about to be cut off from Israel. But the child did not know all these.

The women’s prayer was that the child would make a name for himself, and this is the prayer of all parents for their children. In such a prayer, few would think of success and a name as things that are achieved by godliness, integrity, and other spiritual virtues. The child Obed would become the family head, and his raising would need to prepare him for that. As we have dreams and aspirations for our children, we must ensure that they are godly and spiritual ones.

THOUGHT: (Read Proverbs 22:6.)

PRAYER: Give us wisdom to prepare our children spiritually for life.

THE BLESSING OF THE HOME (11)

The Bible is clear on the roles and duties that different members of the family have within the family setup. There are roles that parents play concerning their children, roles that are commanded by God through His Word. There are also roles that the children have concerning their parents, especially when the children grow up and the parents become aged. The women, as they came to bless the LORD, did note and observe that Naomi would need specific help and they identified the child as the one to offer that help.

“And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age...” (Ruth 4:15). The women foresaw a secure future for Naomi in the birth of this child. The uncertainty of the future was probably what brought Naomi pain and led her identify herself by the name Mara. As she bade her daughters-in-law leave her, she spoke as one without hope. She said, *“if I should say, I have hope...and should also bear sons...the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.”* Yet, Ruth had been married, and Naomi had a grandson. Naomi had one who would be a nourisher of her old age, one who would bear her responsibilities and, as Paul instructed the church through Timothy, *“shew piety at home, and to requite”* her. This was not just to be done out of charity, but it was doing what was just and dutiful. Having been born, trained, nourished, educated and raised from a helpless child, he grew into a mature, responsible and strong adult. He thus must be willing to bear the responsibility of caring for his aged parents who had spent and lost their energy, strength, and vitality of life, and had then turned to be dependent and in need of assistance and help.

The women, who spoke thus to Naomi, were comforting her, wishing her well with what was just, decent and proper. Or as Paul told the Roman believers: *“that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”*

THOUGHT: God's Word puts value in children honouring parents.

PRAYER: Father, may I live right to support my parents in their old age.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

RUTH 4:11-22

PROVERBS 1:8-10

*“Am not I better to thee
than ten sons?”*

THE BLESSING OF THE HOME (12)

The time of old age is a difficult one for any person. It is a time of much heaviness, spent in looking back at how life had been lived, and reflecting on how one used to be. The strength and faculties that one had possessed are now no longer possessed, the choices and mistakes made in life are now clearer in their consequences, and fixed such that they cannot be changed. Even Solomon in speaking of old age presented to us that *“thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them”* (Eccles 12:1) and went on to paint a vivid picture and description of life in old age.

“...thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him” (Ruth 4:15). The reasons for Naomi to take comfort and be assured of her security in the days ahead were attached to the words of comfort and joy spoken to her. The reasons were all relational: the first being the present and continuing relationship with Ruth, and the second being the anticipated joy and relief from the birth of a son and the relationship it brought. Yet, as presented by the women, these two were not mutually exclusive, they were intrinsically related. The fact that Naomi’s future was secured by her relationship with Ruth was not new; it had been earlier attested to by Boaz in Ruth chapter 2. It was clear that Ruth loved her mother-in-law, as seen in her choice to leave her homeland and cleave to her mother-in-law. It was also clear that Ruth loved her mother-in-law by her actions and initiative to go out gleaning and make provision for their sustenance. And, finally, it was also clear that Ruth loved her mother-in-law by the open and honest relationship they had, how she honoured and obeyed her by not hiding things from her, and how she heeded Naomi’s advice and counsel. Therefore *“thy daughter in law, which loveth thee”* was a clear and sure statement that could be attested to by those who knew the relationship that Naomi had with Ruth. This was indeed very high praise for Ruth (a testimony to be desired by every child), and especially considering that it was said by the women of the city as they came to visit Naomi at the birth of Ruth’s son. How would people outside assess our relationship with our parents? What is the picture of how we regard our parents?

THOUGHT: God’s providence gave us to be children to our parents.

PRAYER: (Pray to live right to support our parents in their old age.)

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

RUTH 4:11-22

1 SAMUEL 1:1-10

*“Even a child is
known by his doings...”*

THE BLESSING OF THE HOME (13)

Relationships can be a great source of joy, or pain, in life. In the relationship Naomi and Ruth had, they experienced a fair share of both, but they had gone through them all. They had shared the sorrow of losing their loved ones, the difficulty of a widow's life, the toil of hard work to get food on the table, etc. Relationships are also defined by the sum of the events, both good and bad, in life. Of the relationships people may have, the mother-in-law to daughter-in-law relationship is one that many a time is difficult to maintain.

“...thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him” (Ruth 4:15). The women in their visit comforted Naomi with their assessment and view of the relationship between her and her daughter-in-law. The assessment was one that was aimed to comfort and encourage Naomi and befitted the joyous occasion. They told her not only of the visible love between them, but also of the value of Ruth in the phrase *“better... than seven sons.”*

A similar phrase was used by Elkanah as he sought to comfort his wife Hannah at a most trying and tormenting period. Hannah's situation was a difficult one as Elkanah's attempts to honour her by giving her a worthy portion as they went to sacrifice at Shiloh, probably further fuelled Peninah's taunts that tormented Hannah such that she could not even eat. As Elkanah sought to know what was grieving his wife, he assured her of his love and comforted her with the question *“am not I better to thee than ten sons?”* (1 Sam 1:8). One can only imagine the pain, grief and stress that Hannah went through in that relationship, especially considering the place childbearing was given in that society, and the view of childlessness. It may seem to have some parallels with the state of Naomi and Ruth as two widows were bereft of their husbands and with no children. Children were compared in the Psalms to arrows in the hand of a mighty man. Even in her song, Hannah said, *“the barren hath born seven”* when she had but one son.

THOUGHT: (Read 1 John 4:8.)

PRAYER: (Read Psalm 119:76.)

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

RUTH 4:11-22

EXODUS 2:1-10

“...take this child away,
and nurse it...”

THE BLESSING OF THE HOME (14)

What great honour was given to Naomi by Ruth. As we read this account, the attention was not on Ruth as the mother who had delivered the baby boy. The women who came to visit blessed Naomi, spoke of the child and of Naomi. What a blessing it was for Naomi to have a daughter-in-law such as Ruth, and a kinsman such as Boaz; for they were people who clave to the LORD and His Word. Their allegiance and obedience to God's Word restored hope and joy to Naomi.

“And Naomi took the child ... and became nurse unto it” (Ruth 4:16). The Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments, makes mention of nursing mothers and nursing relationships. From Sarah in her old age nursing Isaac (Gen 21:7-8) to Jochebed being the nursing mother to Moses on behalf of Pharaoh's daughter (Exod 2:8-9), children were nursed, either by their birth mothers, or by an assigned nursing mother. Nursing was the basis for a strong and unbreakable loving relationship, as was seen when it was used figuratively by God Himself (Isa 49:15), and by Paul to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:7-8). The birth of a son brought with it the prospect of a flourishing family. The responsibility of nursing and raising the child was a duty that Naomi took upon herself. She did not look at it as a burden, or some form of trouble. To Naomi, the child was to be “*restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age,*” but for the child to be able to fulfil his God-given duty, he must first be raised in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

From Naomi, we learn the blessings and joys of parenting that would follow responsible parenting. Those who have expectations of their children and hope that they will be responsible as they mature, must take up the responsibilities, fulfil the duties and build the relationship with their children. When our children are under our care, we ought to instruct and “*train up a child in the way he should go*” if we hope and expect that when we are aged and they are mature, they will “*learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents.*”

THOUGHT: (Read Deuteronomy 6:5-9.)

PRAYER: Father, grant us the joy of having children walk in Thy truth.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 19

RUTH 4:11-22

LUKE 1:57-66

“...what manner of child
shall this be!”

LINEAGE OF DAVID THE KING (1)

The closing scene of the Book of Ruth is an introductory scene to the life of David the king. Naomi took the responsibility to nurse and nurture the son born to Ruth and Boaz, while the women who came to visit and praise God with her took up the responsibility of naming the child. Giving the child a name was a custom that prevailed in the whole Bible with some of the names given coming with a meaning that would express the hope the child bore to its parents.

“And the women her neighbours gave it a name...” (Ruth 4:17). The birth of a child brings family, friends and neighbours together. And probably, as at the birth of John, the neighbours and friends gathered together at the circumcision of the child. At the birth of John, neighbours and friends gathered and took upon themselves to give the child a name, probably because the father was dumb and could not speak. Here also, the women took it upon themselves to give the child a name, but no reason was given as to why they chose to do so.

As you read through the Bible (both in the Old and New Testaments), the significance of naming is unmistakable, both in the naming of children and places. From Adam and Eve expressing their hopes in the names they gave to their children, to Lot’s daughters expressing their doubts, naming their sons after their flight from Sodom. Names were constant reminders of circumstance and specific events in life as can be seen in the names given to the sons borne to Jacob by Leah and Rachel in Genesis 29:32-30:24. Names were also given based on appearance like the naming of Esau based on his appearance at birth (Gen 25:25) or the naming of Pharez and Zerah based on the circumstances during birth. There were also names that were given by God Himself like at the birth of Isaac, of John the Baptist, and of Jesus Christ. The same applies to the naming of places as was seen in Abraham calling the place where he sacrificed in Genesis 22:14 or Jacob naming the place where he met with God both while fleeing Esau and when returning with his family.

THOUGHT: Names are significant and are to be chosen wisely.

PRAYER: Give us wisdom, Father, to choose meaningful names.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 20

RUTH 4:11-22

1 CHRONICLES 2:9-17

*“And Boaz begat Obed,
and Obed begat Jesse.”*

LINEAGE OF DAVID THE KING (2)

The conclusion of the Book of Ruth comes with a few questions, as the story seemed to have been about Ruth and about Boaz's family. Here at the ending, however, it seems to be about Naomi. The scene ended with the naming of the child, and there was no indication of what kind of life the child had, or what effect he had on the life of Naomi. Did Naomi live to be refreshed by the child? Did Ruth have other children after this child which was taken up by Naomi, as did Hannah after the birth of Samuel and giving him up to the Lord's service at the Tabernacle?

“...There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed...” (Ruth 4:17). Though a reason for the women (Naomi's neighbours) taking up the responsibility of naming the child was not stated, the reason for their choice of name was given. The child was a son for Naomi's comfort, support and nourishment in her old age. The name given was to be a reminder of this, and thus the name given was one that signified service. The name given was a meaningful one, not contrary to God's will and command, which require children to honour their parents in the Lord. The Bible in the Proverbs talks about men who do not fear God or men, presenting them as *“a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother”* (Prov 30:11). This generation is also set for destruction as they whose *“eyelids are lifted up”* in pride and not humbled in service shall be given to *“the ravens of the valley [that] shall pick it out, and the young eagles [that] shall eat it”* (Prov 30:17). The Bible also talks about the last days, pointing out that one of the signs of the times will be that *“men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy”* (2 Tim 3:2). Many are familiar with the duty of parents to their children, husbands to their wives, and wives to their husbands, but forget or are unfamiliar with the duties of children to their parents. The dutiful child, as the name Obed signifies, is one who is a delight to his parents and one who is a blessing to his parents; and he receives a blessing from the LORD.

THOUGHT: (Read Proverbs 23:24-25.)

PRAYER: Father, grant us children who are committed to Christ, and dutiful at home.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

RUTH 4:11-22

MATTHEW 1:1-6

“Boaz begat Obed of Ruth.”

LINEAGE OF DAVID THE KING (3)

The lineage given in 1 Chronicles 2 gives us a glimpse of the lineage of David. This glimpse shows us how God honoured Boaz and Ruth, granting them grace to be included in the messianic lineage. The focus on the lineage is that it traces God’s plan of redemption, which becomes clearer in the lineage given in Matthew 1.

“...he is the father of Jesse, the father of David” (Ruth 4:17). G Campbell Morgan in “Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible” sums up the Book of Ruth as follows: “The story ends with poetic simplicity and beauty. ‘Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife.’ Naomi at last was comforted indeed. The women of her own people spoke words of cheer to her which unquestionably were full of comfort, as they set forth the praises of the one who had chosen to share her affliction, and had become the medium of her succour. There is a stately simplicity in this story of the issue. It constitutes a record of the Divine movement in the history of the chosen people, for thus the kingly line is ordained, in the midst of infidelity (Judg 21:25), through faithful souls (Ps 40:4). All the period of the Judges was characterised by the failure of the people to realise the great ideal of the Theocracy. They had no king because they were disobedient to the One King. Presently we shall hear them clamouring for a king ‘like the nations,’ (1 Sam 8:5, 19, 20) and one will be appointed by whose reign of forty years they will learn the difference between earthly rule and the direct government of God. Then the man after God’s own heart will succeed him (Acts 13:22); and that man will be David, descended from these souls who, in dark and difficult days, realised in their own lives the Divine ideal, as they walked humbly with God. But this Book flings its light much further on. After centuries had run their course, there sprang from this union of Boaz and Ruth in faith and love, the Man of Nazareth, Jesus, the One and only King of men, because He was not only a Child born to Mary, descended from these, but also the Son of God in all the fulness of that title.”

THOUGHT: “God, in love and might, ever moves on through human failure in cooperation with human faith.”

PRAYER: (Read Mark 9:24.)

LINEAGE OF DAVID THE KING (4)

The blessing that was given at the city gate that morning when Boaz called the nearer kinsman (witnessed by the elders of the city) was *“let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah”* (Ruth 4:12). The lineage of David was traced not from Abraham as in Matthew 1, nor from Israel (Jacob) as in 1 Chronicles 2, but from Pharez. The different genealogies are aimed at specific interests and purpose as the readers are addressed. Therefore, the presentation of the lineage of Pharez in Ruth 4 is a note of triumph as the book closes. The blessings pronounced were blessings bestowed.

“Now these are the generations of Pharez...” (Ruth 4:18). The name of Tamar (mother of Pharez), as well as the name of Ruth (mother of Obed) both appear in the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew chapter 1. Also included in Matthew's genealogy is the name of Rahab who was mother to Boaz and wife to Salmon. Thus, the three Gentile women mentioned in the lineage of Christ in Matthew are implied in the triumph presented in this closing lineage: Tamar during the period of the patriarchs before they went down to Egypt, Rahab at the period of the conquest during the entering in to Jericho, and Ruth during the period of the judges, a time when there was spiritual darkness and everyone did what was right in his own eyes. In three different periods, God's grace extended to Gentiles in their being included in the unfolding plan of redemption. Providence would work out a refuge for David's parents and family (during the period of wilderness dwelling) in Moab, probably as it was where their grandmother Ruth had come from.

Two different people in almost every measurable term, an Israelite and a Moabite, a wealthy land owner and a poor widow, were brought together by the hand of providence. The only thing they seemed to have in common were spiritual virtues, and God used them and through them, raised a great king, and through the king, the Messiah came. As Morgan Campbell says, “trusting souls are the instruments of God.”

THOUGHT: “Trusting Jesus, that is all.”

PRAYER: Oh, Father, for grace to trust Christ more.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

PROVERBS 16:1-9

ESTHER 4:4-14

*“A man’s heart deviseth his way:
but the LORD directeth his steps.”*

LESSONS ON PROVIDENCE (1)

According to the Westminster Larger Catechism, providence is defined as: “God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful; preserving and governing all his creatures... and all their actions...” This statement presents providence as the work of God that reflects His attributes since providence is described as God’s most Holy, Wise and Powerful acts. It also presents providence as having the two functions of preserving and governing. Thus, when thinking of the providence of God, we are to understand God planning, guiding and accomplishing everything that happens according to His plans.

“The LORD hath made all things for himself...” (Prov 16:4). All things that happen have their purposes. Every detail, incident, whether planned or unplanned, occurs within the providence of God. And considering that providence is described as God’s most holy, wise and powerful acts, then it first of all implies that nothing can happen or go against what God has planned. And, secondly, the individual acts and incidents do not in any way detract from the attributes of God. Hence, Proverbs 16:4 includes *“even the wicked.”* It is interesting to note the repetition of the covenant name of God in Proverbs 16:1-9. History is therefore a testimony of the providence and work of God. As such, we are able to trace the providential hand of God through the Book of Ruth, and the same can be traced in every book of the Bible. That is the reason that though the name of the LORD is not mentioned in the Book of Esther, yet it is a book on the providence of God.

“...who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). The providence of God has preserving and governing functions, and Mordecai recognised that when he addressed the concerns of Esther. The events that led to Esther being made queen, despite personal and individual interest, still had divine governance. The steps were ordered for a purpose and Mordecai pointed out that the crisis would have been the reason for her being made queen. And indeed it was.

THOUGHT: (Read Proverbs 16:3.)

PRAYER: (Read Philipians 4:6-7.)

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24

DANIEL 4:34-37

GENESIS 50:15-21

“...he doeth according to his will...

none can stay his hand...”

LESSONS ON PROVIDENCE (2)

According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 8, the question posed is: “How doth God execute his decrees? Ans: God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence.” Providence does not only present God as having a purpose and a plan, but also as One who cannot fail or be defeated in accomplishing His will and plans. God carries out His decrees is the answer given in the catechism. He does what He pleases and none can stop Him.

“...none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35).

The life of Nebuchadnezzar panned out exactly as God had revealed in the dream. Even in giving his advice to the King, Daniel was careful to make sure that his words did not challenge, contradict or go against the sovereignty of God. Daniel had beseeched the king to change his ways without promising an averting of God’s decree. He said, *“if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity”* (Dan 4:27) for a surety, the king would need to and must know *“that the heavens do rule”* (Dan 4:26), for the thing was *“the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king”* (4:24), and as such could not be averted.

“But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good...”

(Gen 50:20). The attempts by the brothers of Joseph to undermine and challenge his dreams ended up with them selling him to the Midianites. This did not work against the dreams, but for the dreams. Their initial thought was: *“come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit...and we shall see what will become of his dreams”* (Gen 37:20). This did not stop God’s plans or work. Their jealousy was used by God to accomplish His plans, and Joseph affirmed that to them after the death of their father and comforted them by showing them how the past was still within God’s plan and, therefore, he had no intent of causing them any harm.

THOUGHT: Even when hard to see or believe, God is still working out His decrees.

PRAYER: (Read Psalm 73:25-26.)

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25

JEREMIAH 27:1-13

PSALM 94

“...that nation will I punish,
saith the LORD, with the sword,
and with the famine...”

LESSONS ON PROVIDENCE (3)

According to the Heidelberg Catechism on Providence, the answer given to Question 27 states that, “The Almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as it were by his hand, he upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by his fatherly hand.” The doctrine of providence thus affirms the authority and sovereignty of God over all that He has created, to order, direct, and use them as He wills for His glory.

“I have made the earth, the man and the beast...by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me” (Jer 27:5). The same power, wisdom and capability by which God made all things is the same power and wisdom that God uses to preserve and govern all things too. Here in Jeremiah, it is metaphorically presented as an “outstretched arm” which is mentioned also in Deuteronomy 26:8 and Jeremiah 21:5. Thus in Jeremiah, the message sent to the nations was one that enjoined and demanded their submission to the king of Babylon, as he by God’s providence had been given the kingdoms of men, as affirmed also in the vision given to Nebuchadnezzar when it was said: “*this matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will...*” (Dan 4:17). William G. T. Shedd in his “Dogmatic Theology” affirmed this when he noted that: “According to the Scriptures, preservation is the immediate operation of God as a distinct and different Being, upon, in, and with the creature as a different and distinct being, and always in accordance with the nature of the creature. In the material world, God immediately works in and through material properties and laws. In the mental world, God immediately works in and through the properties and faculties of mind. Preservation never runs counter to creation. God does not violate in providence what he has established in creation.”

THOUGHT: (Read Acts 17:28.)

PRAYER: (Read Psalm 31:1-5.)

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

PSALM 37:1-11; 23-34

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

“Rest in the LORD,
and wait patiently for him...”

LESSONS ON PROVIDENCE (4)

According to the Heidelberg Catechism on Providence, the answer given to Question 28 as regards the profit to man of the doctrine of providence states that: “That we may be patient in adversity; thankful in prosperity; and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from his love; since all creatures are so in his hand, that without his will they cannot so much as move.” The knowledge and understanding of the doctrine of the providence of God works to affirm, strengthen, and put our faith in God alone.

“Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass” (Ps 37:5). The perspective with which we view, assess and face life when shaped by the knowledge of God and His work of providence changes, especially with regard to the age-old difficulty that surrounds the issue of the prosperity of the wicked and the apparent triumph of evil. The three-fold call to trust given in Psalm 37:3-7 best summarises this change in view and perspective of life and its events. The providence of God requires a response from us, and that response is to be evidenced in our relationship with God despite the circumstances and goings-on around us. Our relationship to God and our approach to life is not to be governed by and based on the happenings of life or our understanding of the circumstances we find ourselves in. Rather, it is to be governed by our trust in God, and our knowledge of Him and His attributes, and His work. Psalm 37 encourages full trust and confidence in God, and this trust and confidence should keep us focused on our duty and submission to God, always doing that which we know to be good and acceptable to God. God has His way, His plan and will, and His time. Our response to this is presented by the Psalmist as to wait patiently for the LORD (Ps 37:7; 40:1). This waiting patiently also involves a prayerful consistency in times of adversity and affliction (Ps 3:4; 18:6; 55:17; 77:1; 88:9; 116:1). Providence is the confidence that God is working according to His purpose and plan for us, and thus *“all things work together for good”* (Rom 8:28).

THOUGHT: (Read Romans 8:31.)

PRAYER: (Read Psalm 27:7.)

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

MATTHEW 6:26-34

MATTHEW 10:24-31

“Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.”

LESSONS ON PROVIDENCE (5)

The Second Helvetic Confession chapter 6 on the Providence of God highlights the importance of the means in the workings of providence, exhorting that they are not to be despised. The confession states,

“Nevertheless, we do not spurn as useless the means by which divine providence works, but we teach that we are to adapt ourselves to them in so far as they are recommended to us in the Word of God. Wherefore we disapprove of the rash statements of those who say that if all things are managed by the providence of God, then our efforts and endeavours are in vain. It will be sufficient if we leave everything to the governance of divine providence, and we will not have to worry about anything or do anything. For although Paul understood that he sailed under the providence of God who had said to him: ‘You must bear witness also at Rome’ (Acts 23:11), and in addition had given him the promise, ‘There will be no loss of life among you...and not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you’ (Acts 27:22, 34), yet when the sailors were nevertheless thinking about abandoning ship the same Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers: ‘Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved’ (Acts 27:31). For God, who has appointed to everything its end, has ordained the beginning and the means by which it reaches its goal. The heathen ascribe things to blind fortune and uncertain chance. But St. James does not want us to say: ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and trade,’ but adds: ‘Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that’ (James 4:13, 15). And Augustine says: ‘Everything which to vain men seems to happen in nature by accident, occurs only by his Word, because it happens only at his command’ (Enarrationes in Psalmos 148). Thus it seemed to happen by mere chance when Saul, while seeking his father’s asses, unexpectedly fell in with the prophet Samuel. But previously the Lord had said to the prophet: ‘Tomorrow I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin’ (1 Sam 9:15).”

THOUGHT: Providence promotes responsibility, duty and diligence.

PRAYER: Help me, Father, to understand my duty and give me diligence in them.

LESSONS ON PROVIDENCE (6)

The doctrine of providence is one that points to the divine sufficiency of God which, according to Thomas Ridgley, promotes and encourages us to “seek happiness in him alone,” a lesson that the Book of Ruth reinforces through the life of Ruth and Boaz.

God as the sufficiency of the trusting Ruth. This is seen in Ruth, a Moabitess, of which nation the LORD commanded saying, “*An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even into their tenth generation...*” (Deut 23:3). Yet, when urged and pressed upon by Naomi to return to her own people and her gods, she refused (Ruth 1:16-17). She chose to cleave to faith, and by faith, to her mother-in-law, accompanying her not out of any prospect or allure of a better future, but committing herself to the LORD such that the testimony she bore was that she had come to trust under the wings of the LORD (Ruth 2:11-12). As she came with Naomi into a land in which she was a stranger, she lived in the land by faith and in accordance with the laws of the LORD whom she had come to trust. She appropriated and made use of the lawful provisions given by the LORD, going out to glean and living in obedience and love with her mother-in-law.

God as the sufficiency of faithful Boaz. This is seen in Boaz, an Israelite living among his people during the period of the judges, being a mighty man of wealth at a time of wilfulness, yet living in conformity to God’s Word and laws. He was a man of faith in a time when corruption prevailed. He trusted in God and did not pervert or distort justice, even when presented with a proposal of marriage by Ruth. He abode by all provisions of the law of God, dealing with integrity, courtesy and courage. He actively pursued what was right and acceptable in the sight of God during a time when the norm was that “*every man did that which was right in his own eyes*” (Judg 21:25), because “*in those days there was no king in Israel*” (Judg 17:6).

THOUGHT: The sufficiency of God is enough for those who trust in Him.

PRAYER: (Read James 5:13-15.)

LORD'S DAY, SEPTEMBER 29

PSALM 40:4-17

PROVERBS 11:27-30

*“Blessed is that man that maketh
the LORD his trust...”*

LESSONS ON PROVIDENCE (7)

The doctrine of providence also points to the responsibility and dutifulness of man under the divine sufficiency of God. Thus, as Thomas Ridgley promotes and encourages us to “seek happiness in him alone,” we do so consciously and lawfully, bound to the dictates of God’s Word and will. This is a lesson that the Book of Ruth reinforces through the life of Ruth and Boaz by showing that within the workings of providence, the trusting and faithful saint is God’s instrument in working out His will and plan. Concerning this, Morgan Campbell in his “Living Messages of the Books of the Bible” noticed three things concerning Boaz. They are as follows:

“First, his loyalty to God in the midst of difficulties. Secondly, he was a man who made application of his relation to God in his relation to his fellow men. He greeted the men who worked for him in terms which disclosed his relation to God. Yet he was neither a slovenly nor a careless man. He saw immediately the stranger in his fields. He took personal oversight of all his affairs, yet he lived a life so godly as to be able to greet his workmen in terms which revealed his relationship to God. Finally, he was a man of caution and of courage. The two things are never far apart. Caution is the very soul of courage. Courage is the true expression of caution. All these things reveal the fact that, trusting God, Boaz found Him sufficient to enable him to live a goodly life in circumstances of difficulty. Thus the secret of grace and beauty of Ruth, and the strength and manliness of Boaz lie in the fact that in differing circumstances, they both lived upon the same principle of simple yet sublime faith in God. Such souls as these are the instruments through which God is ever able to move towards the accomplishment of His purposes. The story of the ultimate values of the faith of Ruth and Boaz is told in the ending of this book. Boaz and Ruth, Obed, Jesse, David. So we see the very footsteps of Almighty God. Boaz the Hebrew, and Ruth the Moabitess in union, become the highway for God towards the ultimate realisation of His purposes.”

THOUGHT: (Proverbs 28:26-27.)

PRAYER: (Use Psalm 43:1-2.)

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

1 JOHN 5:1-5

JEREMIAH 17:5-10

*“...this is the victory that overcometh
the world, even our faith.”*

LESSONS ON PROVIDENCE (8)

The Book of Ruth has given us vital lessons on the doctrine of providence in matters of everyday life facing ordinary people. Through this Book we have drawn lessons from Ruth and Boaz on the workings of providence, the duty to be trusting and faithful as children and servants of God and His instruments in His working out His will and plan in, for and through our lives. In his analysis of the Old Testament Book of Ruth, Morgan Campbell in his book, “Living Messages of the Books of the Bible,” concludes with the following three propositions:

“The living message may be stated in three propositions. First, circumstances neither make nor mar saints. The difficulty of the life of saintship to the wealthy man is answered by the story of Boaz. The difficulty of the life of faith to a poor woman is answered by the story of Ruth. ...as a necessary sequence to the first proposition, I make the second. The principle of victory is faith. ‘Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen.’ Faith is the principle that takes hold upon God, and appropriates all His resources. Faith takes hold of that in God which man needs, and enables God to take hold of that in man which He needs. From both of these people I learn something of the laws of faith. An open mind; a personal decision; direct application of the things believed to the details of every-day life; persistent courage in the face of all difficulty. Faith is not a sentiment about which we sing. It is an attitude of life, based upon the conviction of the soul. Finally the book teaches the value to God of that life, which makes the great surrender, and follows Him in faith. The value of such a life can never be known until we pass within the veil. Remember again the sequence with which this book closes; Obed, Jesse, David. Boaz and Ruth had passed into the light ere David came, the king for whom the nation was waiting, yet the sequence did not end with David.”

THOUGHT: “God leads His dear children along.”

PRAYER: (Use Psalm 43:3-5.)

Notes

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