

## Introduction

- A. Something I've learned over the last decade is that when I'm officiating a wedding, it's really important that we discuss the details of the ceremony ahead of time - particularly the vows.
1. The vows of commitment are key -they're what you're committing to for the rest of your life.
  2. Over the last couple years, it's become increasingly popular for the couple to craft their own personal vows...
    - a) But I'm always a little leery,
    - b) Because as well-intentioned and optimistic as personal vows can be,
    - c) they have a huge potential of being full on lies
      - (1) (not a good way to start a marriage)
  3. I've been standing, officiating a wedding, when one of the bride and groom promised: "I will never hurt you... and I will always cherish you."
    - a) And I'm like: "EEHHH..."
    - b) Why? Because I know it's going to probably be less than 24 hours before you break that vow...
  4. Now, there are some great go-to verses for the vows:
    - a) **Song of Solomon:** I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine
    - b) **1 Corinthians 13:** The many characteristics of Love
    - c) And, the passage that we're covering today:
      - (1) "For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried." Ruth 1:16-17
- B. But it's interesting, as much as Ruth is a love story, this famous marriage passage is not originally a statement between two lovers, it's not a wedding vow...
1. It's an oath of commitment between **Ruth** and **Naomi** to journey through life together
    - a) Before Ruth is a story of *romantic* love, it's first a story of *committed* love.
    - b) A kind of love that - regardless of your relational status - you can and should experience. A kind of love that that is lived out in community.
- C. In the years before my brother and I were born, my old man was a Motown/R&B DJ known as "sweet papa".
1. So when it came time to raise us up, he raised us right:
    - a) Listening to Stevie wonder, Jackson Five, Aretha, Isaac Hayes...
      - (1) I remember Minnie Riperton's hit love song: "Loving You."
      - (2) Opening line says: "Loving you is easy cause you're beautiful..."
        - (a) Truth is: "love ain't easy"
  2. We romanticize love in a way where we think the pinnacle of love is reaching this point where loving gets easy (loving someone so much makes love easy)
    - a) But the Bible knows nothing of this kind of love - an effortless, carefree love.
    - b) If we were to be honest, we know very little about the kind of self-sacrificial, costly, stubborn, loyal love the Scriptures speak of.

c) I would go as far as to say that: *“If love is easy for you, you’re doing it wrong.”*

3. We must remember that the path of love led the very Son of God himself to agonize, sweating drops of blood, begging the Father that there be another way.

a) Does Jesus love us? Infinitely more than we could ever imagine.

b) Did that make it easy? Absolutely not.

4. Love itself, at it’s core, at it’s essence, *isn’t* effortless or *romantic*.

a) When the Bible paints the picture of love, its not drawn in the shape of a heart... it’s drawn in the shape of a cross.

D. We’re going to look at this passage under three headings:

1. **Leaving Home**

2. **Loyal Love**

3. **Life Together**

## I. **Leaving Home**

A. The author of Ruth begins the story by explaining a family’s initial journey.

1. We’re told that it’s in the time of the **judges**, which sets the stage for how decisions were being made at the time:

a) **“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”** Judges 21:25b

(1) It wasn’t: *What is most faithful to the LORD and his covenant people?*

(2) It was: *What is best for me?*

b) This - just like in the 21st Century - was the ruling idea [the ruling agenda].

2. We’re also told that there is this family that leaves Bethlehem in Judah (where the people of God are - a place that God had provided for his people to thrive after delivering them out of the slavery of Egypt) to go wander in the land of Moab, because a famine has hit the land.

a) Now, leaving Judah to go to Moab has some very significant Biblical meaning.

(1) This family has decidedly moved away from the place that God promised to bless his people to find refuge amongst other people. [‘house of bread’]

(2) And to add to it, they go to Moab of all places.

b) **What’s the big deal about living among the Moabites?**

(1) The Moabites were decedents of Moab,

(2) The son born out of an isectutous relationship between Lot and his oldest daughter,

(a) Where fearful for her family’s future, she took matters into her own hands, got her father drunk, and slept with him, conceived Moab.

c) And in a strange series of events, centuries later, here is where this family flees, once again - to take matters into their own hands as well.

(1) Most commentators see this as a lapse of faith and commitment...

(2) Fleeing from God’s people and therefore fleeing from the presence of God.

(3) There is a certain degree in which turning your back on God’s people is turning your back on God. They run...

- B. I came across a list of words that describe feelings, emotions, and experiences that we probably didn't think that there were words for. (Project the follow one at a time)\*\*
1. **Sonder:** *The realization that each passerby has a life as vivid and complex as your own.*
  2. **Opia:** The ambiguous intensity of looking someone in the eye, which can feel simultaneously invasive and vulnerable.
  3. **Rubatois:** The unsettling awareness of your own heartbeat.
  4. **Mauerbauertraurigkeit:** The inexplicable urge to push people away, even close friends who you really like.
    - a) There is a word for that...Frankly, a word that sounds way too obscure for an experience that is, sadly so common.
  5. I never dated - I married my first girlfriend out of high school.
    - a) But from what I know of dating is that when things go a certain direction, people will 'ghost' each other.
    - b) The idea is that if things get hard, or weird, or boring...you end a relationship with someone by suddenly and without explanation withdrawing from all communication.
      - (1) While I've never experienced that in the dating realm - I have at church
  6. We too, have the inexplicable urge to run when things get difficult.
    - a) To flee the covenant community - the very place God has provided for our good, and growth...
      - (1) ...in order to find an easier, happier, freer experience elsewhere..
      - b) When things get tough, or awkward, or vulnerable, or dry - we split.
- C. Important to note something here in Ruth: *What's the result of leaving?*
1. What we find: This family only discovers more brokenness elsewhere(cant escape)
    - a) "so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband" (1:5)
      - (1) First Elimelech, then Mahlon and Chilion.
      - (2) Within ten years, death has torn through this family, (life happens - alone)
  2. Naomi leaves Bethlehem *pleasant* (that's what here name means) and returns *bitter*, "Call me Mara"
    - a) Chapter 1 shows us that Fleeing the Community that God has provided for you only brings more bitterness and brokenness in the long run.
- D. This was Naomi's experience.
1. This is how she had been shaped to interact with God and his people.
    - a) Do what's best for you... go where you please despite how it affects others.
      - (1) This explains why she tries to White Fang her daughters-in-law.
      - (2) "Go back to your people, go get yourselves a family, you don't want me."
    - b) She just assumes this is the way things work:
      - (1) When things get tough - people leave... she will beat them to the punch.
      - (2) Out of the fear of future relational pain - we push people away

2. But despite her experience and despite her misconception about how *love* and *commitment* work, God's grace extends to her and begins to soften her heart.
  - a) **How? Through Ruth**
  - b) "Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her." Ruth 1:14
    - (1) Ruth's love was God's response to Naomi's bitterness and brokenness.
      - (a) How does God provide care, nurture, healing, and grace to his people?
        - i) Through one another.
      - (b) How do we experience God's embrace?
        - i) Through the clinging of one another.
      - (c) How are we reshaped, despite our broken pasts and commitment issues?
        - i) Within the community of God's people.
        - ii) This is where we learn to love and learn to be loved.

## II. Loyal Love

- A. But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you..." Ruth 1:16a
  1. The kind of love we read of here is a *loyal love* - a stubborn love.
    - a) In fact, **It's defiant.**
      - (1) "I defy your attempt to push me away."
      - (2) "I refuse to allow you to throw this relationship away."
      - (3) "I don't care what it costs me, I'm hanging on."
  2. What we're witnessing here is a battle:
    - a) Ruth's love goes head-to-head with Naomi's resistance. ('no'[N] - 'no'[R])
      - (1) Who will win?
        - (a) And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. Ruth 1:18
        - (b) Stubborn love can overcome the strongest resistance.
  3. What we see here is that Ruth is willing to change the entire outlook of her life:
    - a) Residence, identity, her community, her religious ties, her future spouse, etc.
  4. She knows what she's giving up.
    - a) In fact, in verse 9, Naomi blesses her and says:
      - (1) "The LORD grant that you may find rest..." Ruth 1:9
      - (2) The word means "a place of settled security."
      - (3) Go back home and live your best life
    - b) And Ruth says: "I don't want the best this world can give me..."
  5. I've had multiple neighbors who have moved away from tragedy
    - a) At one time, we had neighbors that moved to Stockton from New Orleans after the devastating Hurricane Katrina.
    - b) I have a neighbor now who when he was a child, he had to flee Mozambique, during it's Civil War.
      - (1) This is what people do... you go somewhere that promises a brighter future.

6. Unlike most stories of immigration, Ruth is moving the opposite direction...
  - a) ...Into the direction of more difficulty, more sacrifice, more risk.
  - b) **Why?** Because that's what love does - alter's one's life for the sake of others.

B. Out of this love, she makes a commitment (because that's what love also does) -

1. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." Ruth 1:16a-17

C. **Now, does any of that sound familiar?**

1. If it does, it's because the story of Ruth points us to the greatest story the world has ever known.
  - a) Of one who would leave the safety of his home ("a place of settled security"),
  - b) One who came to earth and immigrated into poverty in Bethlehem.
  - c) One who would intentionally enter into vulnerability, loss, and even death for the sake of others.
2. The Gospel announces to us that *Jesus Christ (the very Son of God)* came to identify with us, to share in our struggles, and even die in our place.
  - a) Despite our sinful rebellion + urge to push away - he pursued us and clung to us
  - b) He was the "word" that met us in the fields of Moab - saying "come home"
  - c) Like Ruth, Jesus said "let death come upon me"... So life could come upon us.
3. As I said earlier, and it bears repeating:
  - a) **When the Bible paints the picture of love, it's not drawn in the shape of a heart... it's drawn in the shape of a cross.**
  - b) This cross-shaped love that casts its shadow over Ruth 1.

D. This is the kind of love that God has extended to us in Christ - to be received by faith.

1. And it's this kind of love that God has empowered us to extend to one another.
  - a) The kind that sacrifices our own selfish desires for the sake of others.
  - b) The kind that is unwilling to simply do what is right in our own eyes.
  - c) The kind that refuses to give up and run when things get dry or difficult.
  - d) The kind that defies resistance - that acknowledges that people are hard to love - so what? You're hard to love, too - We're all hard to love. (Loyal Love)

III. **Life Together** (Let's consider how we can live this idea out, today)

A. **Life together brings necessary vulnerability**

1. In an increasingly digital, hyper-connected world, the temptation to avoid the vulnerability of real-life, in-person-relationships will increase as well.
  - a) As the internet has made it so easy to satisfy basic social needs,
  - b) It has made it really difficult to relate and connect in real life - in intimate ways.
    - (1) [and specially committed ways]
2. Never has it been easier to avoid the vulnerability that commitment requires.
  - a) But never has it been more vital for the church to revive its dedication to real, life-on-life relationships - the kind that is awkward, uncomfortable, and vulnerable.

3. Listen to how the Apostle Paul approached relationship:
  - a) “We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.” 1 Thessalonians 2:8
  - b) The word for “*life*” in the original language is: *soul* or *breath*.
  - c) “We were pleased to bare our souls and entrust our very life-breath into your hands.”
    - (1) Is this the kind of vulnerability we are experiencing in our churches?
4. Now, Let’s not kid ourselves.
  - a) That is a huge risk.
  - b) Because, for many of us, we have bared our souls.
    - (1) And in unfortunate situations, people have hurt us or used us.
5. The Bible doesn’t promise a risk-free vulnerability.
  - a) There are no promises for Ruth that she won’t be hurt..
  - b) And there is no promise for you and I that we won’t be hurt either.
  - c) But this is the crucible of love - vulnerability.
    - (1) We don’t learn how to love and be loved anywhere else.
6. “There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside of heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers... of love is hell.” C.S. Lewis

## **B. Life together sees the story that is bigger than ourselves**

1. If you were to pick up the Book of Ruth, with no understanding of the rest of the story, up to this point, you would think to yourself,
  - a) “this should be called the book of Naomi.”
  - b) Which is fair enough, because she has the main character so far.
2. But what we see as we read on and specifically toward the end it that God is working in the life of Naomi, through her hardships and struggle, to bring about something in/through Ruth.
  - a) This story is for anyone who initially thought that their own story was all about them...
    - (1) But is now ready to discover that God is doing something bigger
    - (2) “How much larger your life would be if your self could become smaller in it... Break out of this tiny and tawdry theatre in which your own little plot is always played and you would find yourself under a freer sky. ” G.K. Chesterton

[Gen 22 - I will make your offspring like the stars of the sky and sand of the seashore]

3. If you've lived your life thus far thinking it was all about you...
  - a) It's time to step into a much bigger, brighter world...
  - b) Into a world where everything that you've experienced and will experience is serving a greater purpose than you could ever imagine.
  - c) Where you're loved, and cherished, and your role is meaningful, but you're not center-stage... and it's not all about you.

**C. Life together speaks to an on-looking world.**

1. "Our relationship with one another is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful. Christian community is the final apologetic." Francis Schaeffer
2. "So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, *the whole town was stirred because of them...*" Ruth 1:19
3. This is what I pray for you Reality.
  - a) That the Coastlands would be stirred at the sight of the loyal love God is bringing about in you.