

## **Under Yahweh's Wings (Part 3)**

### **Ruth**

**Ruth 1:22 - 2:23**

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I do invite you to take your Bibles and turn with me again to Ruth 2. Before we begin the next scene in this great story, I want to take just a moment to retrace our steps briefly because some of you haven't been here, others of you have slept a few times since we studied Ruth last. So far, we have completed the first two acts of Ruth's great story. The first Act 1 called "The Far Country." The first five verses of this little book describes, first of all, the desperate circumstances of the nation. Ruth's story begins in the dark period of the Judges during a desperate time of famine. In the midst of that period one family made an absolutely disastrous choice.

So, basically then what you have in this section is one particular family, the family of Elimelech decides in the midst of God's chastening on the nation to leave, to leave the promised land, to leave the land God had given to His people rather than be involved in the corporate repentance and coming back to the Lord instead they chose to leave. And they chose specifically to go to the land of Moab; a land of idolators, a land where Chemosh was worshiped, a god who demanded infant sacrifice. That's where Elimelech decided to move his family.

As a result of his disastrous and sinful choice comes divine consequences. In verses 3 - 5 of chapter 1 there are divine consequences to that rebellion. Within 10-years-time (now think about what's happened to you over the last 10 years), within 10-years-time this family experienced a famine in their own country, the parent's sinful decision to move away to a pagan land of idolatry, the unexpected deaths of Elimelech, Naomi's husband, as well as her sons. But before the sons died, they married idolators. They married women who worshiped the false god Chemosh. Both of them were then married for close to 10 years without children. And finally, both of Naomi's sons died prematurely and unexpectedly.

We come then to Act 2. That's Act 1, "The Far Country." You see the rebellion. You see all that transpired there. In Act 2 we see "The Journey Home." This section details a remarkable story of

the repentance and the spiritual restoration of Naomi and the salvation of her daughter-in-law, Ruth. The thing that I told you is, Yahweh demonstrates Himself in this section to be a Savior by restoring the land from its drought and famine to food as well as by restoring these two ladies: by restoring Naomi from sin to repentance, and by converting Ruth from idolatry to salvation. Just snatching her out of her idolatry and bringing her to Himself.

Now we are studying the third great act of this story. And it is Yahweh's protection and provision. Yahweh's protection and provision. It begins in 1:22 and runs all the way down through the end of chapter 2. Yahweh's protection and provision. Ruth provides a personal portrait of the cycle of sin as I've told you that was going on during the period of the Judges. You remember that during that period there was disobedience by the people. That was followed by God's judgment, followed by repentance and then God's deliverance.

And that sort of cycle occurs again and again during the Judges nationally but in the book of Ruth and in particularly Ruth 2 we see that fleshed out in one family. That national cycle of sin and repentances in chapter 1 in the life of one family and in chapter 2 we see fleshed out on a personal level: God's deliverance. God delivers Naomi through her newly redeemed daughter-in-law.

The key passage in chapter 2 is in verse 12. Notice it "May the LORD reward your work." This is Boaz's prayer for Ruth. "May the LORD reward your work and your wages be full from Yahweh, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge." The expression at the end of that verse is the key really to understanding the rest of the book. The person who seeks refuge in God is compared here to a baby bird who seeks refuge under the wings of its mother.

This is how both Naomi and Ruth were at this point. Both of these women had sought refuge in Yahweh under His wings. Naomi had repented and returned to her God, and Ruth, the Moabitess, who had worshiped Chemosh her entire life, has now believed in Yahweh, Israel's God. Since they had sought that refuge in Him God now assumed full and complete responsibility for their care.

So, in chapter 2 we learned that through His providence God always cares for those who seek refuge in Him. This third act in the story of Naomi and Ruth consists of three scenes. We've already covered a couple of these scenes, but let me just review them for you.

First of all, the first scene happens in 1:22 - 2:3, and it sets up the meeting of Boaz and Ruth. And I call this section "Yahweh Arranges Human Circumstances to Care for His Own." You see Him behind the scenes pulling the strings to get these two people together. Verse 3 says chapter 2 "So she departed [from Naomi her mother-in-law] and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz who was of the family of Elimelech."

As I noted for you literally the Hebrew text of verse 3 "... her chance chanced upon the portion of the field belonging to Boaz. That's intended to be irony. Doesn't mean it was by chance. It means it was so obviously not by chance. Her chance chanced upon. God arranged all of the circumstances here for the good of Ruth, Naomi and Boaz. When Ruth happened by chance upon the field that belonged to Boaz, it was a remarkable act of divine providence. Because it brought her across the path of a gracious man who would care for her and because he was from the same clan as Elimelech, Naomi's husband which becomes very important in the rest of the story.

Now the last time we studied Ruth together we looked at the second scene in this third act and that is that "Yahweh Uses the Obedience and Compassion of the Righteous to Care for His Own." God is all about caring for His own, and sometimes He uses the righteous to do so. In the dark time of the Judges evil was absolutely rampant, and righteous people were hard to find. But in order to care for these two women who had sought refuge in Him, God arranged their circumstances to bring their path across that of a righteous man.

The interaction between them, between Ruth and Boaz, occurred through just an ordinary providence. In verses 5 - 7 of chapter 2 Ruth had worked in the field with the other workers all morning we're told. But in God's providence, she just happened to take a break in the temporary shelter that was set up for the workers just before Boaz arrived, and that's why Boaz saw her.

The writer's point of view is that Yahweh was involved even in the ordinary providence that caused their two paths to intersect that morning. God was behind the scenes caring for His own arranging for this righteous man to come across this person in need. And you see in verses 8 - 16 of chapter 2 Boaz's obedience and compassion. This is how righteous people respond. I mentioned to you last time that the events in verse 8 - 13 occurred late in the morning when Boaz arrived in the field and there's this first conversation that ensues in which Boaz determines to take care of her. He urged her not to glean in another field. He insisted for her safety that she remain with his female servants. He told her that he'd warned his own workers to leave her alone, and even insisted that she drink from the water that his men had brought from the well in Bethlehem for their benefit that day.

Verses 14 - 16 fast forward about an hour or two from that first meeting to the noon meal. Boaz actually invited Ruth to come and sit with him and with the harvesters, and after she had been seated, he does something that is completely remarkable for a man of his stature, a man of his influence, a man of his wealth. He actually personally serves Ruth.

Now the point of this section is that one of the primary ways that God cares for those who have sought refuge in Him is through the obedience and the compassion of the righteous. Boaz is just doing what God commands righteous people to do in His Word. He's looking out for those in need. He's caring for those who find themselves in difficulty and that's how God was meeting Naomi and Ruth's needs.

Now that brings us tonight to the third scene in this act, and I've entitled it (begins in verse 17 of chapter 2 and runs down through verse 23), I've entitled this scene, "Yahweh is Moved by His Steadfast Love to Care for His Own." That's the point of this section. Here we see Him caring for His own, but we come to understand why. Let me read it for us, Ruth 2:17.

So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. She took *it* up and went into the city and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took *it* out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied. Her mother-in-law then said to her,

“Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed.” So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, “The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed of the Lord who has not withdrawn His kindness to living and the dead.” Again Naomi said to her, “The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives.” Then Ruth, the Moabitess said, “Furthermore he said to me, ‘You should stay close to my servants until they finish all my harvest.’” Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, “It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids so that *others* do not fall upon you in another field.” So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

In these verses we learn that God is driven by His own heart, by His own steadfast love to care for the needs of His people. And as this passage unfolds, we see that He meets the immediate daily needs of His people He meets their needs in the near future, and He even meets their needs throughout the remainder of their lives, and He’s always working, always arranging, always orchestrating in order to accomplish that. In fact, in this passage we see God even acting to benefit the surviving members of his children who have died. In other words, in loyalty to those who have died He cares for the living. Remarkable.

Let’s look first of all at God’s immediate provision in verses 17 - 19. God’s immediate provision. In verse 17 we come to the end of the day. Verse 17 says, “So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned. And it was about an ephah of barley.”

Typically harvesting began shortly after dawn. It did that morning and in Bethlehem in April when the barley harvest was going on that was around 6 AM. And she scavenged in the field we’re told here until evening. That Hebrew word originally meant sunset. So evening refers to that time around sunset. In April there in Bethlehem that’s around 7 PM. So, she worked from 6 AM to 7 PM, and about 7 PM she’s not done. She began then, we’re told, to winnow the grain that she had gathered. Likely she found a spot where the evening breezes were blowing, possibly

Boaz's threshing floor, and using a stick or a flail of some kind she beat the grain until the chaff began to blow away leaving the barley.

When she finished (and that would have been difficult and hard work), when she finished that, the result of her hard day's work was we're told here an ephah or ephah of barley. That's about six dry gallons. About two thirds of a bushel. Verse 18, she returns to Naomi with a joyful report. Notice, "She took it up and went into the city and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took it out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied." At this point if she stopped as we're told at sunset, around 7 then she began to winnow the grain likely another hour's work. So, it's sometime probably around 9 o'clock as she returns to the city. Now Ruth was a remarkable woman, as you've already seen in many ways, and one of those frankly is demonstrated here and that's just physical strength. Because she carried the grain from the fields into the city by herself and two thirds of a bushel of barley weighs between thirty and fifty pounds.

When she arrived at their humble dwelling there in Bethlehem, the first thing that struck Naomi in this story was the sheer volume of the grain. For one woman to gather thirty to fifty pounds of grain in a single day was beyond extraordinary. In fact, we learn from extra biblical documents that in Babylon the typical quota for a male harvester was one to two pounds a day. So obviously, she had worked very hard, and Boaz's workers had obeyed his instructions to make sure they left plenty behind them.

Now another way to consider how much grain this actually was to calculate how long these two women could live on this amount of grain? First Samuel 17:17 says one ephah was about enough to feed fifty fighting men. That means that in one day's work Ruth gathered enough grain to feed these two women for a month. In addition, notice what verse 18 says she took out her leftovers from her lunch with Boaz, and she gave those to Naomi. Verse 19, "Her mother-in-law then said to her, 'Where did you glean today and where did you work?'" Undoubtedly there was a look of shock on Naomi's face as she spoke these words and so she saw the volume of what she had gathered. In context these questions have the sort of connotation of, "Where in the world did you glean today? Where could you have possibly gathered this much grain?"

Notice, Naomi without waiting for Ruth to answer pronounces a blessing on whomever or whoever had been so generous and had shown such favor to them. “May he who took notice of you be blessed.” May the man who paid attention to you and to us and our need may he be blessed by Yahweh. So, verse 19 goes on, “She told her mother-in-law with whom she’d work and said, ‘The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.’”

Even the construction, by the way, in the Hebrew language here of Ruth’s response reflects a kind of excitement. It’s not the typical sort of structured Hebrew it has the idea of nervousness and excitement. Naomi was also excited but for different reasons other than the immediate provision of food. Naomi is excited for a theological reason as well as for a very practical long-term reason beyond a month’s worth of food. Notice her theological motivation for joy was God’s steadfast love.

Look at verse 20. “Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, ‘May he be blessed of the Lord who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead.’” Again, Naomi asked Yahweh to bless Boaz for being a willing instrument in God’s hands. But then, her gratitude looks past Boaz to the ultimate cause of this amazing blessing that they were enjoying. It was Yahweh Himself. Now when you read verse 20 it’s sort of a cursory reading of the sentence, it’s unclear whose kindness Ruth means. Is she talking about Boaz’s kindness who has not withdrawn his kindness? Or is she talking about the Lord. The nearest antecedent to that pronoun who is Lord. She’s talking about God. We could translate the verse like this: May Boaz be blessed of Yahweh. And Yahweh has not withdrawn His kindness. That’s the idea.

That word kindness is a word that’s usually translated in our NAS as “lovingkindness”. It’s the word we’ve come to know and to love and to recognize. It’s one of the most magnificent Hebrew words in the Old Testament. It’s the Hebrew word, “hesed”. Whenever Scripture exegetes the character of God to its most essential level this attribute is always there. In Exodus 34:6 for example the self-revelation of God that’s repeated 6 other times in the Old Testament God says I abound in “hesed”. It describes an essential characteristic of God and the relationship between Him and His people.

Now this word “hesed”, this word kindness describes really two equal ideas. On the one hand, there is a profound love that’s found only in the deepest relationships. And on the other hand, there is a tenacious stubborn commitment to loving that person in the relationship. So, there is love and commitment, love and loyalty. Some translations use the expression “unfailing love” for “hesed”. Others use “steadfast love”. That’s the idea. It’s love that goes to the heart, but it’s love that’s tenacious, that’s loyal, that’s committed, that never changes. This is our God. This is the one unchanging certainty in an everchanging world, God’s steadfast love, His “hesed”.

Now, with that understanding, notice specifically what Naomi says in verse 20. Yahweh has not withdrawn His “hesed” to the living and to the dead. The word withdrawn means to abandon. God has not abandoned His steadfast love, specifically to the living. To whom does that refer? Obviously, Ruth and Naomi. His steadfast love toward us, Naomi says, has not changed. Ruth, what happened to you today proves that our God has not abandoned us. He still loves us with a steadfast love. In addition, notice, she says, “He has not abandoned His steadfast love to the dead.” That has to be Naomi’s husband and her sons. Now that is a remarkable statement. Naomi argued that in bringing Ruth across Boaz that day God was showing His steadfast love to Elimelech, her husband her dead husband and to Mahlon and Killian her dead sons.

Frankly, this verse leads me to conclude that it’s likely that at least Elimelech and possibly these two boys were genuine followers of Yahweh, who chose a path of disobedience and as a result had experienced God’s severe chastening. But in spite of their sin, and in spite of His severe discipline, God continued to show His steadfast love for Elimelech and Mahlon and Killian in the lives of Naomi and Ruth.

He did that day by bringing Ruth across Boaz’s path. Naomi says, “Yahweh has not abandoned His steadfast love toward us.” But God’s “hesed” not only expressed itself in immediate care for their needs. Obviously, they now had a month’s worth of food to live on. When Ruth had left that morning, they had nothing. And she comes home with a month’s worth of food. In the ancient world that was phenomenal.



But that day's seemingly ordinary events had also set in motion plans that would accomplish God's long-term provision for them. Look at verse 20. "Again Naomi said to her, 'The man is our relative. He is one of our closest relatives.'" Here's a very practical reason regarding their long-term future that Naomi is excited. She says because Boaz is our relative. He's related to us. In fact, he is one of our closest relatives. What's remarkable about verse 20 is there are two profound Hebrew words here. We've already met the first one, "hesed".

But there's a second magnificent Hebrew word buried in this one short verse. It's here translated "closest relative." The Hebrew word is "goel," goel. It's sometimes translated kinsmen redeemer. We'll consider this word and its concept more in depth as we get in chapter 4. But let me introduce you to it briefly. "Goel", our kinsmen redeemer. It's a technical term taken from Hebrew family law. It's built on the idea that close relatives have a responsibility for members of their family. Under the Mosaic law the goel, the kinsmen redeemer had a general responsibility to protect the well-being of his relatives as well as specific duties when a relative was in distress and unable to extricate himself from the crisis.

Daniel Block notes five duties of the kinsmen redeemer or the close relative. I'll just give them to you now. We'll come back and look at them more when we get to chapter 4 because they figure into even our relationship to God Himself through our Lord Jesus Christ. But let me just give you these five duties of a kinsmen redeemer under Hebrew family law.

First of all, the kinsmen redeemer was to buy back land that a needy relative had sold to make sure that family property never really passed out of the family. This is in Leviticus 25. If somebody in the family found themselves in a difficult place and had to sell land in order to have the money to live then the "goel", the kinsmen redeemer, was supposed to step in and make sure that land didn't pass out of the family forever to buy it back to redeem it.

Secondly the "goel" was responsible to maintain the freedom of individuals by buying back those who had sold themselves into slavery because of poverty. This is in Leviticus as well. To maintain the freedom of individuals. So, in other words again if one of your close relatives found themselves in a desperate financial situation and sold themselves into some sort of indentured service or slavery, then you were responsible as the "goel", as the kinsmen redeemer the closest relatives to buy them back out of their slavery.

Thirdly the “goel” was responsible to track down and execute murderers of near relatives. This is where you have that picture in the Old Testament of the cities of refuge and the avenger of blood. You remember that reference? That’s the kinsmen redeemer. His responsibility when somebody in his family was murdered if you were a close relative and one of your close relatives was murdered, then you had the responsibility to go and track down that murderer and make sure they were brought to justice and even to execute them at that stage of Israel’s history.

Understand by the way this wasn’t vigilante justice. This was the prescribed legal method for tracking down a murderer presenting the evidence to the elders of that city and then making sure that he was executed.

Number four the “goel” or the kinsmen redeemer was to receive restitution money on behalf of a deceased victim of crime. If a victim was killed and you were a close relative, you received the restitution money on their behalf, Numbers 5:8.

A fifth responsibility of the “goel” was to insure that justice was done in lawsuits involving your close relatives. This is in a number of places in the Old Testament.

So, those were the responsibilities of the kinsmen redeemer. All that means (it wasn’t like a special office), it just meant if you were the close relative, if you were the close relative, you were the kinsmen redeemer, and this is what you were responsible to do. Now, again I’ll show you more of the implications of this concept when we get to chapter 4, but let me just give you a hint. Jesus is our “Goel”. He is our Kinsmen Redeemer related to us through His humanity and steps in on our behalf.

But here in this context Naomi in verse 20 realized that Boaz, the man Ruth had providentially encountered that day, is one of the relatives who has legal responsibilities toward them. He is a “goel” because of the proximity of their relationship, our kinsmen redeemer.

But Ruth isn’t done reporting on her amazing day. Notice verse 21, “Then Ruth the Moabitess said, ‘Furthermore he said to me, “You should stay close to my servants until they have finished

all of my harvest.””” Boaz’s generosity was not confined until a single day. Each day until the harvest was complete, he wanted her to come back to his fields and to work with his servants, and as we noted in the next verse he meant specifically work alongside of his female servants. Verse 22, “Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, ‘It is good. It is good my daughter that you go out with his maids so that others do not fall upon you in another field.’” Naomi agreed with Boaz.

These were desperate times. These were the days of the Judges when every man did that which was right in his own eyes. If you want to know how dangerous this period was, read the book of Judges. Read the end the last few sordid chapters of Judges, and you’ll know why this was really, really good advice. A time of political instability and a time of moral depravity. Naomi’s concern was that others not fall upon you in another field. Ruth was a young Moabite foreigner, an alien in the land. She could easily encounter at the very least prejudice, verbal abuse, ridicule, insults, and possibly even physical harm. So, Naomi urged her to take Boaz up on his invitation.

Now notice the chapter ends with a summary of the next couple of months. Verse 23, “So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest.” Just as she had done on this first day, for the next six to seven weeks Ruth scavenged among the fields of Boaz alongside of his workers. That’s about the time that it would have taken for both the barley harvest and the wheat harvest to be collected. We aren’t told if she and Boaz had any more contact or interaction. But if her daily yield was even close to what it was on this first day, she would have been able to put away enough grain to easily last through the next year.

And if it was well preserved (there were granaries remember in the ancient world where they could be well preserved), it could last and be enough for these two women for two to three years. This was an amazing grace of God in their lives. They went from having nothing, from being destitute, from Naomi having to sell the family land, as we’ll see in chapter 4 to they have all they need to survive. Verse 23 ends by saying, “And she lived with her mother-in-law.” Ruth continued to be personally loyal to her mother-in-law Naomi through these days.

It's really a simple story, isn't it? A simple paragraph, and yet there is so much rich truth here. Let me draw out for us several lessons that just stand out of this paragraph as we've walked our way through it. First of all, we've already seen this, but let me reemphasize it God always provides for His own. That's the point here. These women had sought refuge under the wings of Yahweh, under His protection. And God moves in their lives to care for them. But did you notice the way God ordinarily accomplishes this provision is through our work. This woman worked hard. Thirteen, fourteen-hour days for two months. Yes, God provided, but she worked herself to death in that period of time. This is God's way.

Second Thessalonians 3:10 Paul says, "... even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, ... [he's] not to eat either." One of God's primary provisions for our needs is hard work. However, there's a balance. Don't think it's your hard work that gets you what you have. Even though we must work, it is God who gives us the power to work and who blesses our work for our good. Deuteronomy 8:18, Moses says to the children of Israel, "You shall remember ... [Yahweh] your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth...."

It also works the other way by the way. You remember the prophet Haggai who was confronting the people about not building the temple. And he says to them a number of times in his short prophecy, listen God is eroding what you make. You are putting your money into a bag with holes. Sometimes God reminds us of our dependence upon Him by taking what we make through the needs of life to remind us of our dependence. Work is the primary way that God cares for us, and He's the one who blesses us. He's the one who blesses our work. He's the one who gives us the power to advance if we advance at all. Sometimes God takes us through lean times, financially, physical health, etc. And when He does, not only does He meet our needs through our own work, but the point of chapter 2 is He often meets our needs through the compassion and generosity of righteous people like Boaz.

So, if you're on the receiving end, don't be afraid to receive that; it's from the Lord. And if you're in a position where you have the resources you need, and there's someone in your life who's in need, then make sure that you're an instrument in God's hand in their life. You can do

that, of course, through the church. Many of us give to the benevolence fund. The elders manage that. So, God provides for His own. That's the first lesson. God always provides for His own.

Second lesson, God cares for us, I love this, God cares for us as He did for them by arranging the smallest details of our lives in His providence. Just as it was with Ruth and Naomi and Boaz, God is always shaping and orchestrating our daily and seemingly insignificant circumstances to make sure that our needs are met. And I really think that we miss this so often. Remind yourself, as you think about this passage we just studied, that the events of that day in Boaz and Ruth's life seemed extremely pedestrian and ordinary. Right? I mean if you had been there that day nothing extraordinary happened. Through these ordinary events God was executing an extraordinarily complex plan. But what I want you to think about is this. God doesn't just do that with biblical characters. He does the same in our lives as well.

As I was studying this passage this week, and as I was rejoicing in God's providence in their lives, my mind went back through my own life. I don't often do this, but I want to use this as a point of illustration to you. I want you to bear with me for a moment. Because there were a number, in my own life, there were a number of ordinary days with seemingly insignificant events that, in the end, God used in extraordinary ways to write the story of my life. And I want you to listen, not just because of me, but I'm going to make a point with it so stay with me. Here are a few of those in my life as I thought back on my own experience.

When I was in high school a man in my church whom I had never met walked up to me and offered me a job as an electrician, something I had never done, and a skill I didn't have. God used those electrical skills to pay for my college and seminary which as the tenth child in my family my parents could never have afforded, seemingly insignificant. You want to work for me this summer as an electrician? I don't know anything about it. Well, I'll teach you.

This is God's way. I started college as a pre-law major (just been converted as a senior in high school). I started college as a pre-law major, and as a result I had two years of accounting. When I later changed majors, honestly those classes seemed like a complete waste. But in fact, they prepared me for the business side of ministry. Many years of my ministry were spent managing

large organizations. God used that. Through a seemingly insignificant discussion one day with my college advisor, I decided that I was going to minor in English. Eventually it was that minor that the Lord used to get me a job at Grace to You many years in the future.

During my junior year of college God in His providence used something as small as a tiny little germ. I contracted a virulent virus that put me in the hospital in isolation for two weeks. And it was during those two weeks that I read through the gospels, and God confirmed in my life that He had called me to the gospel ministry, and I changed my major from pre-law to Bible. Just a little germ. In graduate school one day, shortly after I had first met Sheila, on one day we ran into each other on a fairly large campus we ran into each other seven times. It got to be a little awkward to be honest with you. And six of those were unarranged by us. I confess the seventh was [congregational laughter]. It was that day that prompted me to ask her out. And today, she's my wife. Thirty years we have been married.

While I was in graduate school and serving as a teaching assistant, I was in my office preparing for the next day, for the next day's lesson, and I happened to turn my radio on which I never listened to the radio except for news. But I happened to turn on the radio to a small Christian radio station in Gaffney, South Carolina to listen to Chuck Swindoll. A week or two later I was listening again, and I happened to leave the radio on after Swindoll's program was over and for the first time I heard a pastor from southern California by the name of John MacArthur. That began my appreciation for his ministry; a ministry that has profoundly shaped my own.

After considering several potential places to move to from Greenville when my education was completed there, and we decided we were going to leave. Sheila and I decided out of several options to move to Los Angeles in order to be a part of Grace Community Church. As a result of that decision, I ended up working at Grace to You, and that's how my personal relationship with John began. In 1987, September 1987, on our first Sunday night at Grace Community Church a friend called me about an announcement he had seen in the bulletin that I had not seen about a job at Grace to You for someone with a Bible and English background. I had taught both at the college level in God's providence.

I called the next day and a week and a half later, a week and a half after arriving in Los Angeles I was working for Grace to You. After six months at Grace to You I was offered two separate job opportunities on one day. Two different guys at Grace to You walked into my office. I happened, in God's providence, to choose the one to work under Phil Johnson and to edit *Masterpiece* magazine. In retrospect I realize that that's what led to my becoming involved in leadership at Grace to You.

In 1999 Sheila and I decided to leave California and pursue the pastorate. Our decision to leave (we'd even put our house up for sale) was what prompted John to ask me to become the senior associate pastor at his church and his personal assistant. I had no idea of that potential outcome, and I am sure that it probably would not have happened apart from our decision to leave. In my role in John's office over those four years I interacted on his behalf with the leaders of a church in north Texas called Countryside Bible Church. As a result, I became known here and came to know the men here several years later when they were looking for a pastor.

In 2001 my father-in-law got cancer which kept us at Grace church longer than we planned to stay through the spring of 2003 and until after his death. It was only in the late spring of 2003 that the leadership of Countryside expressed an interest in my coming as pastor here. If it hadn't been for my father-in-law's cancer and the timing of his death, we would have left California earlier, and I would not be here.

Now, those are just a few examples as I look back over my life. Seemingly insignificant events on ordinary unremarkable days. I don't share those things to exalt myself in any way. Instead, I share them to exalt the amazing providence of our God. My Father arranged all of those day-to-day circumstances just as He did for Ruth and Naomi and Boaz. And many of them at the time didn't seem to be significant at all to have any long-term ramifications. And yet He used those seemingly insignificant days and events to shape and direct our lives, to use us in the kingdom and to provide for us.

Here's what I want you to think about. If you were to stop and to think through your own life as I have just shown you with mine, you could trace the same hand of God in the events of your life

in those seemingly insignificant days insignificant events that were turning points. That God was behind the scenes just as He was in this story. He has orchestrated your life, He is orchestrating your life to care for you, believer. If you have sought refuge under His wings, He is doing the same thing in your life. Who knows what seemingly unimportant events tomorrow will, in fact, be an amazing act of God's complex and overwhelming providence? I also don't share these things with you so we can all sit back and think well, that's cool. No. It should all prompt us to faith. You can trust your Father. He had a plan in the past, and He has a plan in the future in all the details of life.

There's a third lesson very briefly. God is moved to care for us because of His steadfast love. You see God is the one who initiated a relationship with us. You didn't initiate a relationship with God. He did with you. He sought you out. He regenerated you. He saved you. As we learned this morning, He adopted you. He made a new covenant with you, the new covenant. And here's the amazing thing about our God. He describes Himself as abounding in "hesed", abounding in steadfast love. God never enters into a relationship with anyone that He doesn't stay committed to. His relationship with us is always defined by His "hesed", His steadfast love. He is bound by His very character part of His nature to protect and provide for His own.

If I could summarize what we learned in Ruth 2, it would be the last verse of the most famous Psalm in Scripture, Psalm 23. For those who've sought refuge in God, surely goodness and steadfast love, "hesed", will follow. The Hebrew word there is to pursue, to chase down like a prey. Surely ... [God's] goodness and ... [His steadfast love] will ... [chase me down] all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Let's pray together.

Father, we bless You that You are a God abounding in "hesed", in steadfast love. That You love us with the profoundest love and the deepest of relationships. A love that only You have and that You are committed to us. That You are tenacious in that love. Love that will not let us go.

Father, help us to trace Your hand through the details of our lives and to give You praise. We bless You, oh God. We have sought shelter under Your wings in the Person of Your Son.



Continue to care for us continue to show us Your steadfast love. Father, surely surely Your goodness and Your steadfast love will chase us down all the days of our lives here, and we will dwell in Your house and in Your presence forever. Comfort us Father. Give us confidence and trust in light of this.

We pray in Jesus Name. Amen.