

Thankful Living Week 5: Thankful Legacy Ruth 4:9-22
David Bawks - Pathway Community Church (December 6, 2020)

Hello Pathway! Greetings to you. We have only a few weeks left of this year, and I hope you are finishing the year strong. How has giving thanks been going for you this year? Have you been able to take time to express gratitude and focus on all that you have to be grateful for?

Today we are finishing our series called Thankful Living. We have gone through the story of Ruth to see the lessons we can glean from her example. We started in Ruth 1, first noting the grief and loss that both Ruth and Naomi had experienced.

❖ **Express gratitude regardless of the situation.**

Then we moved to Ruth chapter 2, where Ruth and Naomi returned to Judah and began to set up a new life. Ruth started to harvest in Boaz's field, and things started to look up.

❖ **Lean into the strength gratitude provides.**

In chapter 3, we exploring the relationship between Boaz and Ruth and the value of gratitude within our relationships.

❖ **Make gratitude a dominant characteristic of your relationships.**

- 1. Accept good things as gifts, not birthrights**
- 2. Be grateful for people, not just things**

Today we are finish with Ruth chapter 4.

⁹ Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰ I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!"

¹¹ Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. ¹² Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴ The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! ¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For

your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.”

¹⁶Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. ¹⁷The women living there said, “Naomi has a son!” And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

¹⁸This, then, is the family line of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron, ¹⁹Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, ²⁰Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, ²¹Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed, ²²Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.

Last week we looked at the concept of the kinsman or guardian redeemer, the relative who could step in to marry a widow and help to provide children and keep the land within the family. When Ruth lay down at Boaz’s feet by the grain pile, she asked him to be her kinsman redeemer. But he first had to check with a closer relative, which he does in the first part of chapter 4. He goes to inform him that Naomi is selling the land that had belonged to her husband. He is the first in line to redeem it, but there is a catch: he would also need to marry Ruth. That would be an interesting detail to find on an open house flyer, wouldn’t it, and with the house is this lovely young lady pictured here... or you’re going through an open house, and the agent mentions, and by the way, one other thing about the house that you need to know, in this room is your future wife...

The closer relative says he cannot do it, and has to give up a sandal to seal his refusal. We are told in verse 7 that taking off your sandal and giving it to the other person was a standard procedure for legalizing transactions. Now I don’t know exactly why they did this. Some people have said it symbolized victory, like the custom of a king putting his foot on the neck of an enemy that he had defeated. Others have interpreted it more spiritually, that it represents faith in the person you are selling to. The exact meaning isn’t totally clear, but I imagine that if we were to try this today, for many women I know, they would have to be very careful about what shoes they wear when they go to make a transaction. For example, BG loves Janet’s boot collection and I’m sure she would love such an arrangement. I can just imagine BG going to buy something and she’s like oh no I wore the wrong shoes, I can’t afford to lose one of these.... And then the other woman is like yes, I love those shoes, I’ve been looking for those boots everywhere, now I’m halfway there... In any case, this opens the door for Boaz to marry Ruth.

Ruth is a wonderful story of overcoming hardship and loss. If you’ve missed any of our earlier messages, you can find them on YouTube, and I’d encourage you to go back and read all of Ruth to get the whole story. It is a love story that ends, as most romantic stories do, with a wedding. This month our focus has been on thanksgiving, and how we can cultivate an intentional life of gratitude. As we finish Ruth’s story, here is my summary for today:

❖ **Make thanksgiving part of your legacy.**

At the beginning of this year, we started by exploring the story of Gideon in the book of Judges. Ruth also took place during the time of the judges, we're not sure which one exactly, so this might have been about the same time as Gideon. Gideon left a complex legacy of both victory against the Midianites and the temptation to sin through the altar he set up that became an idol. We looked at how unintended consequences can shape and direct our legacy in ways we never wanted them to go.

Ruth was an ordinary person who made a special sacrifice and experienced tremendous grace and favor from God. But she also **left an extraordinary legacy.**

In just a few weeks we are celebrating Christmas, and remembering the birth of Jesus Christ. Matthew begins his gospel with a genealogy, a list of Jesus's ancestors going back to Abraham. One section of Matthew's genealogy is exactly the same as the last four verses of Ruth. Matthew's list is quite unusual for a few reasons: 1) he includes women, who were not always included, and 2) he includes scandal, including Perez who was born out of incest. Perez is an ancestor of Ruth, the starting point of her family line included in our passage today. Ruth herself is another usual aspect of Jesus's lineage highlighted by Matthew because she is a foreigner, born outside of the covenant people of Israel but included and integrated into Israel's faith and community. Ruth is an example of the promise given to Abraham to bless all the families of the earth.

Ruth blessed her mother-in-law Naomi with a grandchild, Obed. Obed grew up to be the father of Jesse and grandfather of King David, so Ruth became part of the royal bloodline of Israel. From her story, I see this principle to encourage us.

1) Hope in the future reversal!

In Isaiah 61, Isaiah writes of the anointing of God's Spirit to proclaim a year of God's favor, the same passage that Jesus read at the beginning of his ministry. Isaiah writes that God has anointed him "to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor." God promises a reversal: that the last will become first, the weak will be made strong.

Ruth's story is a reminder of how God brings joy and renewal out of grief and loss. It is a demonstration of God's desire to see all people, no matter their background, come into the family of God and participate in the story of salvation. Ruth had much to be thankful for.

I believe that all of us have much to be thankful for now as well as hope for the future. Remember that there's always something to be thankful for. If you can't pay your bills, you can be thankful you're not one of your creditors. And remember that the more difficulty you are in now, the greater your expectation of God's coming reversal.

2) Take time to consider loss and death.

Here's a proposal to help you think through your legacy, and the impact you hope to leave behind. Thinking about our own death is uncomfortable for many of us, often discouraged in our culture, but this strategy can be helpful in building up our appreciation of our life and what we have. BG and I have just gone through the process of setting up a will and trust, actually signed it this week, and it has been odd to consider and plan what will happen when we die and we're gone, but it has been helpful.

Juliana Breines writes, "One way to do that is to engage in the **Mental Subtraction of Positive Events** practice, which involves considering the many ways in which important, positive events in your life—such as a job opportunity or educational achievement—could have never taken place, and then reflecting on what your life would be like without them."

(https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/four_great_gratitude_strategies).

Considering loss and grief has been demonstrated to be very beneficial. Jeremy Smith provides some examples of this: "... when Araceli Friasa and colleagues asked people to visualize their own deaths, their gratitude measurably increased. Similarly, when Minkyung Koo and colleagues asked people to envision the sudden disappearance of their romantic partners from their lives, they became more grateful to their partners. The same goes for imagining that some positive event, like a job promotion, never happened."

(https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/six_habits_of_highly_grateful_people)

All of us will leave a legacy that outlasts us – the question is what will it be. One of the most sobering things about being a parent is having your actions and words watched and constantly repeated, either to you or others. BG often says she can tell how "well" she's doing as a parent by listening to how the girls talk to each other or to their toys; the words or tone they use can be very revealing about our subconscious attitudes. If you're a parent, how can you raise children who are thankful? For all of us, how can you make gratitude your legacy – that when people think of and remember you, they think of someone who seized the opportunities they had, and gave thanks.

You may have heard the story of a family that was sitting around the breakfast table one morning. As the custom, the father returned thanks, blessing God for the food. Immediately after, however, as was his bad habit, he began to grumble about hard times, the poor quality of the food he was forced to eat, the way it was cooked, and much more.

His little daughter interrupted him, "Dad, do you suppose God heard what you said a little while ago when you were giving thanks?"

"Certainly," the father replied with the confident air of an instructor.

"And did he hear what you said about the bacon and the coffee?"

"Of course," replied the father with a note of caution in his voice.

Then his daughter asked, “Dad, which did God believe?”

Our series is called Thankful Living because gratitude is a lot more than a verbal expression or a passing feeling when things are good. Part of the danger of being a Christian for a long time is that certain things can become routine like giving thanks before a meal or praying about situations. But the real test of our faith is not just what we say in prayer but what we do after. Like the father in the story above, it is possible to claim a thankful attitude while living an ungrateful life. Of course, legacy goes beyond children; it is something that you become known for in all your relationships. How can you be remembered as a gracious and grateful person?

Here's another idea for increasing your gratitude for something – try giving it up. Some researchers tested this and had 55 people eat a piece of chocolate, and then broke them into three groups – the first group didn't have chocolate for a week, the second group was asked to binge on chocolate for the week, and the third group could do whatever they wanted. At the end of the week they asked each person how happy they were, and guess who was the happiest? It was the ones who hadn't had chocolate for the week. And the ones who binged and ate the most were the least happy. That's the difference that gratitude can make!

(https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/six_habits_of_highly_grateful_people)

I believe in the power of fasting to focus our prayers and our spiritual discipline. In January, I'll invite us to do a Daniel fast to begin the year with going without the usual food we enjoy and dedicate the year in prayer.

❖ **Make thanksgiving part of your legacy.**

1) Hope in the future reversal!

2) Take time to consider loss and death.

Reflection Question

1) What's your biggest takeaway from this series?

2) What one thing can you do in the coming week to increase your level of gratitude?

Let's close in prayer.