

## “Spiritual Security”

### Ruth 1: 1-18

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. 2 The man’s name was Elimelek, his wife’s name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

3 Now Elimelek, Naomi’s husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

6 When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of His people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return from there. 7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. 9 May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest (security) in the home of another husband.” Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud 10 and said to her, “We will go back with you to your people.”

11 But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? 12 Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons—13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!”

14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. 15 “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

16 But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” 18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

“The land of opportunity.” That’s where they were bound. Times were tough. Money was short. Work was hard to come by. And so the four of them — husband, wife and two sons — pulled up stakes and journeyed to a far country.

They came to stay. They did what they had to do to fit in. Difficult as it was, they learned the language. They mastered mystifying social customs. That immigrant family labored hard, and, in time, their new neighbors accepted them. The new land treated them well. In return, they became model citizens.

The two boys grew fast. It wasn't long before they began talking and dressing and acting like any other children of that land. To their mother and father — their own flesh and blood — the two sons sometimes seemed like strangers. It was hard to watch them grow up without the traditions of the old country. But the parents were proud of their two boys, and they were equally pleased with their new country. The old country had been left behind. There was no turning back now.

Then, tragedy struck. The husband died suddenly, leaving his wife with two late-teenage sons and no savings. Times were hard, but the little family scraped by. Soon, the boys met and married local girls. It was not long after the second son's wedding that the unspeakable happened. First, one son died, then the other.

For their mother — whose name was Naomi — this news was devastating. It rocked her life to its very foundations. In the space of a short time, this immigrant woman had lost the three people she held most dear in all the world.

Naomi takes stock of her situation. She's an Israelite woman living in Moab. She's worked hard every day of her life. But in that place and time, neither she nor her daughters are permitted to inherit property.

In that society, a woman belongs wholly and completely to her husband. Should she be widowed, her sons — who do have the right to inherit — are duty-bound to take some of those resources and use them to care for her. If there are no sons, her husband's brother is required to take her in. But Naomi is an immigrant. She has no husband. She has no sons. She has no brother-in-law. The only family she has — her two daughters-in-law — are Moabites. They have their own families in the area. They will be taken care of.

As for Naomi, it's hard to imagine a worse set of circumstances. She's too old to marry again. The best she can hope for is the charity of strangers — who may (if she's lucky) hire her as a household servant. Her life will be dawn-to-dusk labor: hauling water or pounding laundry on the rocks by the stream. When the day is done, her only place to curl up at night is in the straw of the stable.

For the first time in 10 years, Naomi's thoughts turn to the old country, to Israel — to the snug house in Bethlehem she and her husband Elimelech left behind. "I wonder who's living there now?" she asks herself. The famine is over, they say. Israel is prosperous again. "Surely there are still some kinfolk in Israel who will take me in," Naomi says to her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. "I've made up my mind. I'm going home." "We will come with you," they reply.

Naomi looks back at them in astonishment. "Stop this foolishness!" she snaps. "I can offer you no future. You know that. Your place is with your own families." But the two young women are persuasive. They love their mother-in-law very deeply. They convince Naomi to allow them to come with her. [NOTE 1]

The three of them are not even out of Moab before Naomi has second thoughts. She stops in the middle of the road, turns to Ruth and Orpah, and *commands* them to go home to their own mothers. They are still marriageable, she tells them. “The Lord grant that you may find security, each in the house of your husband.” “Orpah kissed her mother-in-law,” the Scriptures say — a respectful kiss, a kiss of blessing, a good-bye kiss. But Ruth “clung to her.”

The verb “to cling” is the very same word used in Genesis 2:24 to describe the relationship of Adam and Eve: “a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife.” Ruth holds fast to Naomi, who tries one more time to convince Ruth to go. But Naomi’s resolve is weakening. Ruth responds with some of the most famous lines in all literature: “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; 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 thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” —Ruth 1:17

[NOTE 2] It’s nothing less than an oath of faithfulness, a truly extraordinary thing for a young Moabite widow to say to her widowed Israelite mother-in-law! Ruth has absolutely no reason to go with Naomi — to risk a journey of many days on foot, to a foreign land and a murky future. No reason, that is, but love.

It’s love that alters the equation, that redistributes the weights on the scales. It’s love that impels Ruth to turn aside from the only home she has ever known and continue down the dusty road with everything she owns bundled on her back.

**Spoiler Alert:** You can read ahead in the story of Ruth and discover a happy ending: how she and Naomi do make it to Israel, how they find some distant relatives, and how Ruth marries one of them. But that’s not our focus today. Today let’s linger on that phrase of Naomi’s, that blessing to her daughters-in-law: “The Lord grant that you may find security ...” (The blessing, rest, security) Ruth takes a big risk when she turns her back on familiar territory and follows her mother to the unknown land of Israel. But in that act of love, she’s trading some physical and financial security for something of much greater value: spiritual security and a path that ultimately leads to Bethlehem.

[NOTE 3] *Security.* That’s what life’s all about, some will tell you. It’s the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, the IRA coming due, the lottery ticket with all six numbers matching the ping-pong balls. The world is a fierce and hostile place, many will tell you. The life-task of each one of us is to somehow keep the chaos at bay, to gain some measure of this thing called “security,” to take care of our own, and to “*look out for number one.*”

Even after Jesus is safely dead, the chief priests know that “you can’t be too careful.” They need a guard at the tomb, for security. Pilate sends them on their way. “Knock yourselves out, boys. Make it as secure as you can.”

If the people who try to sell us things are any indication, security is able to capture our imagination just as it captured Peter’s and the chief priests’. Everything from tire treads to investment advice is marketed with a 30-second story line that features a threat to our security and then answers the threat with the product offered for sale. The

tire tread commercials are generally set on a dark and stormy night, and they generally feature a woman driving a toddler somewhere. ...

Political ads often have a more subtle message but one that is equally concerned with leaving us feeling just a little insecure — insecure, that is, until we vote for the preferred candidate. Candidates vie to be identified as the one who will be the most tough on crime, the one who has the best plan for securing the borders, or the one who can best protect us from all enemies foreign and domestic.

Everyone is interested in keeping us safe. Cell phones, security systems, taking our shoes off in the airport security line, getting the right medical tests after the age of 50: almost everything can be sold as a way to keep us free from threat. ...secure!

As the first Christians came to recognize the risen Christ, they experienced boldness and freedom of speech that surprises those of us who read their stories. It is as if their security came from the inside out. ...What might that kind of freedom change things for you? How might it change the way you listen to the nightly news? How might it change the way you pass a stranger on the sidewalk? How might it change the way you imagine who was against you and who was for you?—Mary Hinkle Shore, “The Insecure Tomb,” *Day1.org*. If your security isn’t dependent on outside forces, that changes things. If your security comes from within, from your relationship with Jesus Christ and your familiarity with the power of the Holy Spirit, the world and evil has a much harder time getting a hold of your life.

Security is a good thing — no doubt about it. A certain group of steelworkers discovered just how good a thing it is back in the 1930s as they were building San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge. Oh, and by the way, the Mackinaw Bridge is just as spectacular, if not more, than the Golden Gate Bridge. Amy and I drove over it as part of our bucket list vacation, just a few years ago, to see the Sequoias and Redwoods in California. Compared to the monstrously huge trees the bridge was just meh.

Back to the story. The construction company didn’t install safety devices during the first part of the project of building the Golden Gate Bridge. Twenty-three workers fell to their deaths. For the last phase of the project, a huge net was deployed for the staggering cost (at the time) of \$100,000.

At least 10 men fell into the safety net and were saved. That was a marvel in itself. But the most remarkable thing of all is this: from the day the net was hung, the steelworkers accomplished 25 percent more work per day. That’s how important it was to be assured of their security! I can relate. I did a lot of work when I was younger on roofs. You can work a lot faster when you are not afraid. My former brother-in-law decided to do a spec house, which is when you build a house with no particular buyer in mind hoping you can sell it for much more than you put into it. So I agreed to do the roof. This was in Wisconsin and I promised to pay Amanda, Courtney, and my wife if they helped me. I worked until dark, but we got it all done in one day. But Amy was carrying shingles and walking around on the roof with no problem until we got near the peak and she looked down through the slit where the two sides of the roof came together. All of a sudden she was sliding her butt on the roof and moving very slowly.

The realization of how high above the ground she was working robbed her of any security she had. Until she looked down, she felt secure, but that security was taken away when she realized how high above the ground we were. **Security can be both a blessing and a Curse [NOTE 4]**

Security also become an obsession? We've all heard tales of misers who scrimped, saved and did without necessities, all to protect themselves from poverty, but who died leaving millions behind. We've all known people who've felt so personally *insecure* that they would do almost anything to earn affection from others. Then there's that oft-quoted phrase, "In the interest of national security." It was national security that the Nixon White House so frequently invoked. But history has revealed that it was a smoke screen, behind which they hid evidence of a multitude of "dirty tricks."

Sometimes we are called to step out of our security, our comfort zone, to take a risk so we can learn, grow, and be blessed. The basic problem of faith today is the question of God's existence, or, more precisely, whether or not God "makes a difference" in our life or the world. The reason it's so hard to find the answer to that question is that we do everything in our power to make sure that God won't have to make a difference. We guard against every unforeseen occurrence; we minimize the variables; we insure ourselves against every possible accident, including "acts of God." In short, we try to put our life on such a secure and self-guaranteed basis that there is no room for any will other than our own. It's as though we set out to discover life in a laboratory that we had tried our best to sterilize. No wonder it is difficult to discover the "mighty acts of God."

Our chief instrument in this attempt to conquer the future is our money. We spend it on insurance, market forecasts, research and development, and even on fortune-tellers. Why not see if this remarkable tool could not be put to another use? Why not set out deliberately to use it as a means of providing the sort of conditions under which God's power would become manifest and God's presence made known? To carry through our laboratory analogy, I am suggesting that we use money to establish a "culture medium" in which the acts of God may grow and become visible. ... [NOTE 5]

I have known many families who have been challenged to give sacrificially — to the church in some way to further the Kingdom — and have discovered that the risk they took brought exciting discoveries. There was still enough food for the table; the family focused on their newfound burden and thus learned to share; the "financial crisis" never developed. In other words, by using money to create risk rather than to avoid it, a "space" was opened for the graceful touch of God. New friends, new tasks, new joys, and new values crowded onto the scene. It was like a fresh start.—H. George Anderson, from "Stewardship As A Lifestyle"

So security can be a blessing. There are times when it can become a curse, like when we refuse to give up any security and give in to fear and let that fear dictate our lives and keep us from having an impact on people by pointing them to Jesus. Ever heard of anyone who's a slave to their stuff, to their bills? Do you know anybody who is a slave to security, to feeling safe? In those cases, security becomes a curse.

[NOTE 6] There are also times when security is still a **good thing**, *but not the best thing*. Listen to these words, from a great political leader of our country: “The things that will destroy America are prosperity-at-any-price, peace-at-any-price, safety-first instead of duty-first, the love of soft living, and the get-rich-quick theory of life.” Now who do you suppose said that? Some 1960s radical? Some austere belt-tightener of the 1990s? Guess again. It was Teddy Roosevelt, one of the most determined, full-speed-ahead promoters of this country — and particularly its business — to occupy the White House. Roosevelt lived in an era when speaking of morality in politics had not yet gone out of fashion. He believed that financial prosperity — and the security it represented — should never become an end in itself. There were higher values, Roosevelt believed, than mere survival.

Sometimes nations, as well as individuals, need to live with a certain degree of risk if that’s what it takes to uphold those values. Now what, do you suppose, is **Spiritual Security**? Ruth sets aside her craving for security and follows her mother-in-law, Naomi. She does so for one reason, and one reason alone. She does it for love.

In taking those first steps down the winding, dusty road to Bethlehem, Ruth declares her decision to live on the razor edge of risk. In so doing, she trades her physical security for spiritual security. As she makes that fateful decision, she puts all her trust in God. As it turns out, the road she and Naomi travel will lead to Bethlehem, in more ways than one. “In more ways than one.” What does that mean? You have to turn to the first chapter of Matthew to find out. There, as you scan through the cascade of Hebrew names that is the genealogy of Jesus, you come to the words, “Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.” (Matthew 1:5-6). [NOTE 7]

This very same Ruth — the Moabite widow who impulsively left her homeland on a journey everyone (even Naomi) thought was crazy — becomes, by the sheer grace of God, ancestor not only to King David, but also to Jesus himself. Ruth’s personal journey leads her to Bethlehem. But in a spiritual sense, her journey leads also to a certain Bethlehem night, centuries in the future. A star hangs high in the sky. Shepherds stand astonished at angel-song. A certain descendant of Ruth named Joseph smiles at his wife, Mary, who’s holding their newborn baby in her arms.

What if *Joseph* had been obsessed with security? What if he had carried through on his original plan — once he’d learned of Mary’s pregnancy — to “dismiss her quietly,” as Matthew coldly puts it? Instead, Joseph has a dream and follows it, defying the conventions of his society and standing faithfully beside a woman everyone tells him he should abandon.

The difference — as with Ruth and Naomi — is love. Joseph loves his wife and will not leave her, even if it means giving up some of his cherished security.

Every time we give a gift, of any kind, we do set aside some measure of our material security. Every time we give — voluntarily parting with money we could use for other purposes — we take on a certain degree of risk. That’s why we are so joyful when people give above and beyond a tithe, to the church. It’s because they are

choosing to trust in God, that if they put Him and His Will above their own security and comfort, He will bless them. It is saying, I trust God to take care of my needs. Or it is being thankful to God for His blessings. So, in one way or another, it is taking on some measure of risk to give sacrificially. [NOTE 8]

In the same way Ruth, as she decides to turn her steps that day toward the unknown land of Israel, takes the risk rather than returning to the familiar territory of Moab. Ruth gives up every claim she has to security, save one: her claim to spiritual security. In doing so, she embarks on the greatest adventure of her life: one that her Lord will bless in wondrous and extravagant ways. —*Carl Wilton contributed to this material.* Can we follow her example? Last Fall when things were very tight for Doster Church and our Savings was used up, we didn't panic. We spent less and trusted in God and He provided! Please take a moment and think about what God might be asking of you? Where might God be asking you to take a risk and trust in Spiritual security, the spiritual security of God's Word, His promises, and teachings? Please write down one way that you can trust in Spiritual Security and move forward in your relationship with Jesus today. Let's just take a minute of silence and listen to what God might be saying to us right now. Grab a pen and write it down. Let's pray ... AMEN.

**Sermon Notes for “Spiritual Security” based on Ruth 1: 1-18**  
**Given at Doster Community Church May 21, 2023**

- I. “Ruth” clings to Naomi. The same word used in Genesis 2:24 to describe the relationship of Adam and Eve: “a man shall leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife.” Ruth was not going to be dissuaded.
- II. Understand that Ruth’s oath of faithfulness is truly extraordinary. There is no other reason for Ruth to go with Naomi other than love. Love alters the equation and urges Ruth to take a huge risk.
- III. Security, is what our society tells us life is all about. We work hard for security. Job security, relationship security, retirement security. “Look out for number one,” yourself and your family. Everybody wants safety.
- IV. Security can be both a blessing and a curse. It also can become an obsession because there are so many voices saying we need it. Finance, Insurance, retirement funds, warranties, guarantees, home safety, etc.
- V. Sometimes we are called to give sacrificially or give up security/comfort to accomplish something for God. Sometimes we are called to learn and grow outside of comfort and security. That’s why it is so important to learn to listen to God.
- VI. One of satan’s best tools is to use the good, to keep you from the best thing. Security is good, but it can be a curse when we live and make decisions out of fear instead of love and gratitude to God.
- VII. What is spiritual security? When the security comes from within, out of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you have spiritual security. It is when we live and make decisions based on love or faith in Christ that we have spiritual security. Do we trust God to take care of our needs?
- VIII. So what are you going to do about it? Spend some time in prayer listening for God to speak. What thoughts come to your mind? Please write down one thing you can do today to step out in faith with spiritual security. How might God be asking you to risk a little?