



Series: Ruth	Reference: Ruth Chapter 3	Title: Strategic Planning & Sexual Tension	Date: 9.17.17
Website Writeup:			
When we see God moving do we passively sit & wait, or do we step out in risky faith? How do we become strategic faith planners who act when we see God moving around us?			

Color changes in text indicate slide changes

-SLIDE PERSON: PLEASE RECORD THE SERMON-

UPG Prayer of the Day... (replaced by Sammy Zondervan Testimony)

SD Gordon, a Boston preacher, once brought an empty bird cage to church. He'd met a 10 year old boy on the street & noticed ten birds in the cage he'd caught. He asked the boy his intentions who explained he'd play with them until he got tired, then feed them to his cats. Moved by the fate of the birds the preacher offered to buy the whole lot along with the cage, which he did. Then, at first opportunity he let the birds go free.

Today's sermon title is *Strategic Planning & Sexual Tension* which is what chapter 3 is about. My proposition for you today is, *be on a faith offensive*. In other words, *what's God doing, and how can I take a faith risk to be involved in it?*

We start out our story in Chapter 3 with Naomi having an amazing turn in countenance. Naomi was depressive in Chapter 1 when she'd failed to lead the two young girls, Orpah & Ruth to the God of Israel; rather she led them away. Orpah made that choice to go back to Moab & its gods. Ruth however stepped out in risky faith, adopting this relationship with the God of Israel despite the fear it may've brought her. Naomi was then hopeful by the end of Chapter 2 when she saw what Ruth had stumbled onto when gleaning in Boaz's field - a near relative & possible Kinsman Redeemer. Finally Naomi's come full circle, now faith filled & directive in Chapter 3. Exhibiting the qualities of a strong faithful woman able to lead Ruth. It says...

1 One day Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for? **2** Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. **3** Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. **4** When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do."

Since Naomi's head has cleared of that burdening depression she notices one thing, the providence of God in this situation. Reading the signs & seeing opportunity. Saying to herself, 'This is no mistake, there's something going on here. God must be moving & I want to take advantage of it.'



There was a man who was born on the fifth day of the fifth month of 1955, whose lucky number was five. On his birthday he went to the racetrack & was astounded to see that in the fifth race, scheduled at 5:00p, a horse called Pentagram (meaning 5 pointed star) was running, with the odds of 55 to 1! Rushing off to the bank, the man was astonished to find he had exactly \$5,555.55 in his bank account. He withdrew the whole amount, dashed back to the races & bet it all on Pentagram to win....Pentagram came in fifth.

It's possible to misread the signs; to be wrong in sensing the leading of God in life. We're not talking divination, magic or gambling, just being spiritually tuned to what God's doing. God sometimes works in supernatural instances where he does something so clearly from him we label them miracles; always exciting having little to do with our actions. But, God also works in ways of providence, orchestrating events to bring about his end for our lives. This isn't as exciting, since it always means I have to do something, To put myself at risk, to be in active partnership with him.

You all know the familiar old story of the flood victim sitting on his roof waiting for a miracle from God. A raft floats by & a man yells, "Get in! I'll take you to safety!" "NO, I'm waiting on a miracle from God!" A boat came by, "Get in, we'll get you outta here!" "Nope...waiting on God to perform a miracle! Thanks but no thanks!" A helicopter hovers overhead & drops a lifeline, "No thank you, waiting on God!" And in the end the flood waters rise & the man drowns. He gets to heaven & asks God, "I waited on you, why didn't you save me!?!?" And God replied, "I sent a raft, a boat & a helicopter, what more did you want?"

It's important to be able to cultivate such a relationship with Christ we can hear his leading & realize he does most of his work through situations & people. And it's in those times we act on that leading. There are two ways to react in the Christian life. You can be passive, sit back, resist evil & sin; sit on your roof. Or, you can actively live by faith being strategic in your faith planning, stepping out in risk as you see God moving, both in his Word & your experience; stepping into the raft, the boat, or grasping onto the lifeline.

You can say, "God seems to be moving this way; I'm going to take action." And it's in those times God blesses. Hebrews 11:6 says, *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists & that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

Seeking takes action, faith & risk. God's waiting for us to be strategic faith planners, to step out in our trust of him & take action. The world won't be reached for Christ without strategic planning. John Piper says churches which don't see God's providence around them, who don't see & hear God moving, **react by developing a maintenance mentality.** They do nothing bad, but they don't do much good either, they only maintain the status quo. Will Six:Eight sit on the roof, or live in risky faith? Good question? There are opportunities for us through our Community Groups & their Partners.

Sue Patt, a friend of mine, recognized God wanted Muslims to know Christ. She saw it in the Scriptures, and also in personal experience. It seemed God was calling her to

minister to Muslims, so she took action. Instead of waiting around to miraculously bump into a Muslim, she took a job one day a week at a diner owned & operated by a Muslim family. Now she has weekly contact with Muslims in order to minister to them. It's often about our choices. Strategic faith planning, that's what Naomi's now modeling to us in chapter 3. But if you aren't looking, not listening, you won't act. And the longer you don't listen & don't act, the harder it gets to hear God. C.S. Lewis once said, 'the more a man feels without acting, the less he'll be able to act...in the long run, the less he'll be able to feel.' Inaction & passivity deaden faith & passion.

We could volunteer for certain things in our community, or throw a neighborhood party, since we want all opportunity to meet neighbors & influence them where they are. We can't wait for them to come here, they won't. We recognize from the Scriptures & from our experience God wants to move towards them & use us in process. That's why we've been very intentional in the strategic planning of planting Six:Eight in this community. It's why our community groups spend 25% of their time in connection to the outside community, partnering with them in order to have avenues of relationship leading to evangelism.

But it seems there's a feeling of the meddling mother-in-law here. Why would Naomi tell her to do this? Doesn't it seem she's asking Ruth to sexually throw herself at Boaz? "Go to him in the middle of the night, uncover & lie down by his feet, he'll tell you what to do." Seems a bit racy & provocative. It could go one of two ways, the grain could go flying in the throws of passion, or Boaz could sleep through this. So, why in this way? Which brings Ruth into focus once again, it says starting in verse 5:

5 "I will do whatever you say," Ruth answered. 6 So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. 7 When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. 8 In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet. 9 "Who are you?" he asked. "I am your servant Ruth," she said. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer."

They've winnowed the grain, the chaff's been blown away, the harvest's sitting in piles, and all present have given thanks to God for what he's done; there's been a celebration of thanks with eating & drinking - then everyone falls asleep. The threshing floor is a poetic mirror of Ruth's life. A woman whose past has been blown away, the chaff of her old life's gone, newness has come. God's does the same in our lives - blows the chaff away leaving us with the seed of new life planted in us sprouting into Christ-likeness! She's found refuge under the wing of God as Boaz said to her in 2:12. And, it leads us deeper into understanding his provision for her as a result of her faith. This is symbolic of a new beginning for her again & there's a heightened sense of expectation here & even some sexual tension. What's going to happen?

Ruth's obedient & does exactly what Naomi tells her - almost seems like she's throwing herself at Boaz. Taking the situation into her own hands, it seems shameless. Pushy, won't wait around for him to ask. It's like the guy who dates his girlfriend for 3 years, she's waiting, but he never even hints of getting down on one knee. One night they go to



a Chinese restaurant & the waiter asks, “How would you like your rice?” And while staring at her date, she answers, “I will have mine dry, uncooked & thrown, PLEASE!” But there’s not even a first date with Ruth & Boaz!

When I was a kid, they had the yearly Sadie Hawkins Dance. The dance where the girls were expected to ask the boys. All the boys put in the shoes of these poor girls who usually had to just sit & wait, unable to take initiative. If they didn’t get asked, they didn’t go, that’s it. Nothing they could do. So all of us guys would nervously make jokes trying to mask the fact that inside we were in knots; would we be asked? This is sort of the ancient Judaism’s version of Sadie Hawkins. Believe it or not, in this situation, culturally it was Ruth who had to make her intentions clear.

We’ve talked about how Levitical Law would allow for a Kinsman Redeemer in past sermons. A close male relative who could marry a widow reclaiming all inheritance for her, allowing her to continue the dead husband’s name through the firstborn male of this second marriage. But strangely the onus is on the woman to make her intentions clear. The closest male wasn’t bound to do anything, and it wasn’t him who could ask, it was her. So, what Ruth does here, as instructed by a wise mother-in-law, is actually noble & within all propriety. To uncover & lay down at his feet was an entreaty for him to marry her. It would seem Naomi & Ruth have read the subtle signs from Boaz as to his intentions & they’ve made a strategic plan of faith action to see things come about. They’ve done this well, within the bounds of culture & propriety.

Back in verse 9 Boaz had recognized she’d *taken refuge under the wings of God*, and the same language is used here. This was his hint, as if to say, “I see in you a woman of God, who’s noble & upright, and I want to show my love for you. A woman I would marry.” The word used for the ‘corner of his garment’ is actually the same word for ‘wing’. Reminiscent of his words to her in 2:12. But also from Ezekiel 16:8, where God’s speaking of Israel as a young maiden he’s taking as his wife, using the same terminology: *‘Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine.*

It’s important for us to read the signs here. Boaz has expressed a high admiration & care for this woman. He’s done it in good character & with propriety. But it’s not his place to ask for the relationship to go further. I remember translating for the court systems in America. The Javanese people I would translate for had a very distinct cultural characteristic. They would never answer a question directly. Linked to their overt politeness I spoke of last week, it was just too rude to do so. As a result, it always seemed like they were lying. They weren’t, they just culturally couldn’t speak in direct terms. Therefore they were always giving round about answers which sometimes bordered on, if not dipped into, the preposterous. For instance, ask a Javanese for directions, and if he doesn’t know, he culturally can’t say that. So, he will send you off into the wild unknown, only because culturally it feels more rude for him to say, “I don’t know. You have to ask someone else.”

The judge & lawyers however weren't aware of this cultural aspect of the Javanese. Finally one day the Judge stopped the courtroom procedure, asked everyone to leave except me, and then looked down on me from her desk on high & asked, "What in the world am I missing here? Either you stink at translation, or there's something else. And, it doesn't seem that you are a bad translator." I explained she had to become adept at reading between the lines & this would enable her to then to ask the right questions. It made for a much easier courtroom experience after she knew this.

Naomi's read the signs, being an older woman & having more experience, she could easily see Boaz's intentions. She wisely pushed Ruth out of the nest & into this Kinsman Redeemer's arms. She knew Ruth had to make her intentions clear, and although the situation is filled with a healthy sexual tension, there's no impropriety – only two people following the proper Scriptural & cultural rules which govern their lives. So, Ruth, by doing this, shows a clear intention to Boaz not for illicit sex, but she's saying, "I've taken refuge under the wings of God, and now I want to take refuge under yours as well, will you marry me?" This was her marriage proposal; her Sadie Hawkins moment.

And now we find Boaz & his character shining through again.

10 *"The LORD bless you, my daughter," he replied. "This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. 11 And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character. 12 Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. 13 Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning."*

14 *So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, "Don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor." 15 He also said, "Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out." When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and put it on her. Then he went back to town.*

16 *When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, "How did it go, my daughter?" Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her 17 and added, "He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" 18 Then Naomi said, "Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today."*

Boaz, again shows full kindness to her. He once again speaks words of love, respect & gentility. He calms & reassures her. Furthermore, he guards her reputation; it's not that they did anything wrong, but gossips wouldn't interpret it that way. But above & beyond that, Boaz seems to know that if something is God's will, then it will come about. He shows an incredible amount of righteous restraint. Picture it; he has a younger woman lying at his feet asking to marry him. He's a man of power over her. He's tired & a little merry from all the partying. This would be the perfect moment to be morally compromising, but he isn't.



And, in risk of losing this welcome opportunity he says he can do nothing until all avenues of propriety have been exhausted. His trust in the providence of God is incredible. It's almost as if you could hear him say, "If God wills, then we'll be together, but there are things which have to happen first." This then puts Ruth & Naomi in the hard position of waiting. They've made their strategic plan & carried it out. They've created a Godly sexual tension, made their intentions clear, but sometimes the hardest thing to do is to wait on God. Many of us are in that position of waiting. Waiting on a spouse & it's hard. At times we think to ourselves & excuse the vernacular, "Why wait, I just wanna get laid!" But there are things which need to happen first. God's hand needs to move. But first & foremost in that time we must remember that not all were meant to marry. As a matter of fact Paul says it's better for a man not to. What should be first & foremost in our mind is our own obedience to the call of God to go in making disciples of all nations; His Kingdom initiative. Jesus said, seek first the kingdom & everything else will fall into place (my paraphrase of Mt 6:33).

So where are you today in your faith? Are you sitting passively, waiting for God to move, never really doing anything bad, but doing nothing productive at the same time? Are you seeing God's providence in situations & people around you? Are you standing on the brink of stepping out in risky strategic faith? Do you need to make a phone call? Make a move? Make a decision? Say something? Change your career direction? Pray over someone? Or simply ask the Holy Spirit for more clarity?

There are those of you here today who've not even taken that first risky step of faith of giving your life to Christ. He's waiting for you, today's the day of salvation if you'll take that risk. He's bought the birdcage, and wants to open the door & set you free. You no longer have to live in fear of the cat; Christ has paid the price for you, as your Kinsman Redeemer. He's willing to pay your debt with his blood & buy you back into his family. He wants to blow the chaff away from your life & plant new life in you growing into something beautiful. If that's you, go to the prayer corner after the sermon & make your intentions clear to someone there, I am sure they will lead you in that prayer!

It's all in your choices, be strategic, live in risky faith. Make strategic choices based on the call of Christ as found in the Scriptures. Then when it's all said & done; when you have done all you can do, sit back, and wait patiently to watch what God's going to do in life around you. Be on a faith offensive. What's God doing, and how can you take a faith risk to be involved in it?



COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS

Blued Typeface is meant as notes for CGI's. Don't feel the need to get to all the questions below, just what you feel is good, and creates conversation well. You don't need to print these questions out for people, just use it as your own notes to go off of, ask questions, and lead discussion.

Begin by asking the group to recap the story of Ruth up to chapter 3, let them share...

1. How would you define God's providence?
2. Do you believe God's providential hand is guiding your life? If so, can you recall some instances in your past where you've seen it clearly, even in hindsight?
3. So, Ruth & Naomi are reading the signs of God's providential hand in this story and taking action in risky faith. Would you have interpreted the events the same & chosen to do what they did?
4. Comparing the two illustrations below, which one feels more like life for you?
 1. **Do you mistakenly see things which aren't there, gambling away opportunities when you should hold on like this first man?** *There was a man who was born on the fifth day of the fifth month of 1955, whose lucky number was five. On his birthday he went to the racetrack & was astounded to see that in the fifth race, scheduled at 5:00p, a horse called Pentagram (which means a 5 pointed star) was running, with the odds of 55 to 1! Rushing off to the bank, the man was astonished to find he had exactly \$5,555.55 in his bank account. He withdrew the whole amount, dashed back to the races & bet all of it on Pentagram to win....Pentagram came in fifth.*
 2. **Or, do you wait on God missing an opportunity he's sent your way?** *You all know the familiar old story of the flood victim sitting on his roof waiting for a miracle from God. A raft floats by & a man yelled, "Get in! I'll take you to safety!" "NO, I'm waiting on a miracle from God!" A boat came by, "Get in, we'll get you outta here!" "Nope...waiting on a God to perform a miracle! Thanks but no thanks!" A helicopter hovers overhead & drops a lifeline, "No thank you, waiting on God!" And in the end the flood waters rise & the man drowns. He gets to heaven & asks God, "I waited on you, why didn't you save me!?" And God replied, "I sent a raft, a boat & a helicopter, what more did you want?"*
5. How does this verse speak into this idea of living in risky faith? How does this verse define faith? Hebrews 11:6, *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists & that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*
6. How do we live in mature risky faith? When is it God speaking, or just you? What are the things which guide us in knowing his leading & seeing his providential hand? ([Confirming what we hear through God's Word, the Faith Community & strong Christian counsel, the Holy Spirit, etc.](#))
 1. Are you in the Word daily in order to gain guidance? If not, what holds you back?
 2. Are you deeply connected to good Christian counsel in this local church? If not, what holds you back?
 3. How do you hear & recognize the Holy Spirits lead in life? ([We match it with the two above; God's Word & good Christian counsel](#))
7. What holds us back in living a more risky faith when we feel God is calling us to something? ([Fear of failure, indifference, busyness, selfishness, etc.](#))
8. Discuss what you think of Sue Patt's decision at the top of p3 to work at a Muslim restaurant. How was this both strategic & risky in light of God's calling in her life? How does that strategic faith decision bring her life in line with what God is doing in the world?
9. What would you say is one thing God is calling you to take a risk in right now?