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Lessons of Faith from a Poor Moabite Widow

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Lessons of Faith from a Poor Moabite Widow

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January 31, 2017

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Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 37:1-17](#)

[Ruth 2:1-16](#)

[James 5:1-6](#)

There is no other book in the Bible like that of Ruth, in which the author has stooped so low as to recognize an inferior person like Ruth, a poor Moabite widow, in the lowly action of gleaning corn in a field (Ruth 2). Yet, extraordinarily, Ruth is one of the only two women in the Bible who have books named after them.

The book of Ruth began with the story of Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons in the midst of leaving a famine-stricken Bethlehem for the pagan land of Moab. Ten years after her husband has passed away, an event which was followed by the deaths of her two sons, Naomi migrates once again. This time, she returns to the now-prosperous Bethlehem along with one of her Moabite daughters-in-law—Ruth. For us, it may seem like Naomi made the most logical decision anyone would make in her unfortunate position; when there was no food in one place, she moved to another, and when she lost her immediate family, she returned to where her relatives were.

But after reading chapter two in light of chapter one, I came to realize that Naomi had missed one crucial thing which Ruth seemed to have already learned: the concept of God's providence. In chapter one, Naomi's understanding of God's providence was limited to only prosperous times. When times became hard, she concluded that God's hand was turned away from her, and named herself *Marra*: the bitter one. Instead of trusting in the living God, who repeatedly displayed His miraculous works to her ancestors, to deliver her, she ran away from one problem to another—from famine to the death of her loved ones. Through her actions, Naomi seems to think no differently than a non-believer who is concerned with his or her earthly needs—namely the comforts of food and family—without a transcendent understanding of the source of all her blessings. Naomi did not fully understand that providence is not limited to specific places, certain groups of people, or geographical locations.

In contrast, I find that Ruth exhibited unconditional faith—almost to the point of blind, irrational trust in God, despite being in a very unfortunate position as both a heathen and a childless widow in the male-dominated Israel. Because of her status, she could have easily been socially ostracized by Israelites. Naomi realizes this, and urges her daughters-in-law to return to their parents, remarry, and start their own families in Moab. But despite the knowledge of Naomi's unfortunate past and unsure future, Ruth still chose the unconventional route. The only possible explanation for Ruth's seemingly illogical choice was that her trust was rooted in God, not in her mother-in-law. When Ruth stated, "your God will be my God" (Ruth 1:16), she was making a decision that was not based on her temporary situation, but which was based on her unconditional faith in God's providence in the long run. Ruth's choice turned out to have a significant impact: both in the course of her life, and also in the course of human history. God blessed her greatly by uniting her with her future husband, Boaz, and grafted her into the lineage of Christ as a member of the covenantal plan.

Unconditional faith is an idea that often echoes in our ears, but for many of us, it remains a foreign concept which is rarely practiced in our daily lives. Maybe, like Naomi, we often perceive the extent of His power from the mindset of a limited human being. For instance, when we pray for someone who has fever, we're able to confidently ask God for his healing and speedy recovery. However, when we pray for someone who is diagnosed with stage 4 of cancer, our prayers tend to end with "let Thy will be done" as a form of mental preparation for that person's imminent death.

We tend to rely on human solutions in the face of huge crises in our lives, and forget that God's providence extends to every single aspect of our lives. Yet Matthew 10:30 says, "And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

Ruth taught me that the best decision for us within God's masterplan might not always be the most logical decision in the eyes of human beings. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." If we believe this to be the truth, then we will never make decisions that are motivated by fear, but will act with unconditional faith in the One who created and provides for each and every one of us.