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The Tales of Two Love Stories

By Rachel Gilman

When people think of the word love, they often think of a romantic love between a man and a woman. Most people never even consider that there exists an impenetrable love between a mother and a daughter that can be even stronger than this romantic love that people commonly think of. These two types of love are addressed in the book of Ruth. In Ruth, there exists two types of love stories. There is a familial love story between Ruth and Naomi and a romantic love story between Ruth and Boaz. Through these stories, we are not only able to understand that we are capable of loving other people who are not of our own blood, such as a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in the case of Ruth and Naomi, but that we must also be selfless and committed people if we want to find a strong and lasting love.

The familial love story between Ruth and Naomi embodies two of the most important characteristics when it comes to love, selflessness and commitment. Their story begins when Naomi's husband dies and her son marries Ruth. After ten years, Naomi's son also dies, and as a result, Ruth and Naomi are left to be together without their husbands. They decide to travel back to the land of Judah, where Naomi had heard that the Lord had given his people food. It is on this journey that Naomi's first act of selflessness occurs. As they are traveling, Naomi turns to her daughter-in-law and says, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband" (*HarperCollins Study Bible*, Ruth 1:8-9). It is at this moment that Naomi shows her true love for her daughter-in-law, Ruth, through this selfless act. Although Naomi wants companionship on her journey to Judah, she gives Ruth the opportunity to leave her and return to her own biological mother. Furthermore, when Ruth refuses to leave her, Naomi says,

Turn back my [daughter], why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown?
(*HarperCollins Study Bible*, Ruth 1:11-13)

In this passage, Naomi is telling Ruth that she will never bear anymore sons for her to marry, and so she should not stay with her, but should instead go back home to a place where she can find a

new husband. Again, Naomi is showing her selflessness by allowing Ruth to return home. Naomi wants Ruth to stay with her, but she realizes that it is in Ruth's best interest for her to leave and go back home. She even goes to the extent to tell Ruth that even if she could bear a son for her, she would have to wait several years to wait for him to grow up, and it is unfair for her to have to wait for that, even though she wants Ruth to stay. Naomi truly shows her love for her daughter-in-law through these actions.

The familial love story between Naomi and Ruth is strengthened even more when Ruth expresses her complete commitment to her mother-in-law. As Naomi tells Ruth that it is fine for her to return home, Ruth insists on staying with her and traveling to Judah to make a new life. Her commitment to her mother-in-law is apparent when Ruth says,

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 – 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! (*HarperCollins Study Bible*, Ruth 1:16-17)

In this passage, Ruth tells her mother-in-law, Naomi, that she will follow her wherever she may go and will embrace her lifestyle no matter what it ends up being. She even goes to the extent to say that even after Naomi is dead and buried, she will still remain in the same area until she herself dies. Ruth's willingness to give up her old, familiar lifestyle in order to stay with Naomi on her journey to Judah truly shows her commitment to Naomi and the love that she has for her. The familial love story between Ruth and Naomi can help society today learn many important truths about familial love. One important aspect of love that the relationship between Naomi and Ruth provides a witness to is the fact that in order to gain a strong familial love, there must exist a sense of commitment and selflessness between the two people. Ruth and Naomi demonstrate this when Naomi's selfless nature insists on Ruth's return home for her well-being, but Ruth's commitment to her mother-in-law balances out their relationship and causes them to stay together and develop a strong love between them that lasts throughout the book of Ruth.

Secondly, and most importantly, Ruth and Naomi's unique mother-in-law, daughter-in-law relationship teaches today's society that a strong familial love can exist between people that are not blood related. Most people assume that if you are simply related to someone through marriage, there can never exist a lasting familial love that is present among blood relatives. Also, society's common view of mother-in-law, daughter-in-law relationships is that the two have a strong hatred for each other and can never get along. However, Naomi and Ruth challenge these beliefs through their lasting and committed relationship in the book of Ruth. Naomi treats Ruth as though she is her own daughter, loving her so much that she is willing to let her go. In return, Ruth acts as though Naomi is her own mother, committing herself whole heartedly to their new

life in Judah by giving up her old familiar life so that they can stay together. They never once mention to each other the unusualness of their mother-in-law, daughter-in-law relationship. Ultimately, Ruth and Naomi demonstrate to today's society that a strong love can truly exist among two people that are not blood related and among an unlikely pairing such as a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

In the romantic love story between Boaz and Ruth, Boaz also embodies the commitment and selflessness sides of love. Their story begins when Ruth decides to work in his fields in order to provide some sort of income for Naomi and herself. As soon as Boaz sees Ruth gleaning wheat in his fields, he begins to take care of her and take notice of her. He soon promises her that he will marry her if the kinsman will not act as next-of-kin for her and acquire the land that Naomi is selling. It is at this point in the story that Boaz shows his true committed love for Ruth. Boaz buys the land that Naomi is selling in order to keep Naomi and Ruth from being separated from their landholding and to keep the inheritance within their family. Boaz demonstrates his commitment when he says,

Today you are witnesses that I have acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place. (*HarperCollins Study Bible*, Ruth 4:9-10)

By giving this statement, Boaz takes on the double obligation of acquiring the land and taking Ruth as his wife. Even though Boaz will lose his own inheritance by marrying Ruth, he still decides to buy the land anyway. He truly shows his commitment to family and to Ruth when he willingly acquires the land in order to ensure that Ruth and her children would not be separated from their landholding or family inheritance. He could easily have let Ruth's kinsman acquire the land, but he knew that the man would not marry Ruth and would then cause the inheritance to be passed out of Ruth's family. However, Boaz sees that this is not right and that the land should be kept within Ruth and Naomi's family, and as a result he steps in and offers to acquire the land. This grand gesture that he makes for Ruth's benefit truly shows his commitment to both family and Ruth. Without this commitment, Ruth and Boaz would not have developed the same lasting love that was obtained throughout the story. Through Boaz's actions it is clear that commitment is a major factor in love, and that without it, it is difficult to find the best kind of lasting love.

This love story between Ruth and Boaz can teach society today about what it truly means to be selfless in love. When Boaz decides to buy the land that Naomi was selling and make Ruth his wife, he willingly gives up his own inheritance so that Ruth's inheritance would not be passed out of the family. He did not do this selfless act for his own benefit, but instead did it out

of love and care for Ruth, so that her inheritance would be safe. Today, people can use Boaz's actions as a way to understand what it really means to be selfless in love. Through his actions, being selfless can be defined as making an action that does not benefit oneself but rather is made solely for the betterment of the person that you love. In today's society, sometimes people's ideas become misconstrued on what being selfless really involves. Many people assume that by being selfless they should get a selfless act in return or the act should end up benefiting themselves in the long run. However, Boaz's actions ultimately show them that being selfless requires loving another person so much that you are willing to give up everything to help the one you love without expecting something in return.

Throughout the book of Ruth, the two love stories between Ruth and Naomi and Ruth and Boaz teach us a lot about the important characteristics of love and the misconceptions that our society today holds about familial love. Both the relationships show that commitment and selflessness are major components of love and without these two characteristics it becomes difficult to acquire a love that is strong and enduring. Also, the unique mother-in-law, daughter-in-law relationship that Ruth and Naomi have disproves the common misconception in today's society that a strong, committed familial love cannot be achieved outside of blood relatives. Both of these stories are unique and different from each other, but ultimately both the familial love story between Ruth and Naomi and the romantic love story between Ruth and Boaz, can teach our society today a lot about what love really is.

Works Cited

The Harper Collins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version. 2nd Ed. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2006. Print.