

## **Life on the Home Front: Seizing Unlimited Possibilities**

Ruth 1:15-22

### **Pointed Toward Home**

John Henry Jowett, the great British preacher once wrote, *“The Bible does not say very much about homes; it says a great deal about the things that make them. It speaks about life and love and joy and peace and rest. If we get a house and put these things into it, we shall have secured a home.”*

The words he wrote almost a century ago are just as true today as they were in his day. The very things he talks about are the things that need to be a part of our homes as well.

### **Family Matters**

For a long time now, I have been convinced that God has a way of working out his purposes in and through family.

God puts us in family so that his love has a way of being made known. He puts us in family so we are able to be nurtured and supported.

Family is the essential building block of God’s Kingdom and it behooves us all to do everything we can to make sure our families are as strong as they can possibly be.

Family matters.

### **One of the Great Stories of the Old Testament**

Today we consider one of the great stories of the Old Testament. It is a story of love and devotion. It is a story of hope and redemption.

It is a story of God’s good purposes for our lives. In the end, it is a story about the unlimited things that are possible when we hang with family.

The story of Ruth is one for the ages.

The context is this. A famine hit Israel forcing Naomi and her family to move to Moab. They were there for a long time, time enough to set some pretty deep roots.

While there, Naomi’s two sons married. Their wives, Ruth and Orpah, were both from Moab. As the years passed, Naomi’s husband not only died, but so did her sons, leaving her with her two daughters in law.

Years later, the famine in Israel subsided and Naomi was able to return home.

Looking out for Orpah and Ruth, Naomi encouraged both to stay in Moab.

At first, they were fixed on staying with Naomi and re-locating to Israel, only Ruth ended up doing so.

*“Where you go,” she said, “I will go and where you live, I will live. Your people are my people, your God is my God; where you die I will die, so help me God.”* (Ruth 1:16-17)

## **Letting Go**

There are a number of things about this story that strike me as helpful for today’s families.

Front and center is the selflessness of Naomi. Naomi was quick to look out for the interests of her daughters in law.

Naomi had grown to love them. She wanted the very best for them and was willing to do whatever she could to make sure that happened.

A third grade math teacher asked a boy in her class, *“Suppose your mother baked a pie and there were seven of you—your parents and five children. What part of the pie would you get?”* *“A sixth,”* said the boy. *“I’m afraid you don’t know your fractions,”* said the teacher. *“Remember there are seven of you.”* *“Yes,”* said the boy, *“but you don’t know my mother. She’d say she didn’t want any pie.”*

A mother’s way is always the unselfish way, or at least it should be.

In her estimation, Naomi felt it was best for Ruth and Orpah to stay in Moab and continue their lives there. As much as she loved them and wanted them to stay with her, she knew that the most loving thing she could do was to let them go.

I’ve always felt that the process of letting go pretty much defines what parenting is about. Letting go is not at all easy for the one letting go or, for that matter, for the one being let go.

Consider the College Entrance Scandal as of late. While parents have been indicted on any number of things, they are certainly guilty of not allowing their kids fend for themselves.

One of the tougher things about raising a child is teaching them to ride a bike. They start out with training wheels, gain confidence, and eventually get to where they can ride without them.

Letting them go for the first time is something else. Our every instinct is to protect them. If we can keep them from scraping their knees we’ll chose to do that every time.

The same sort of thing is in play when your child drives solo for the very first time.

Letting go is particularly tough when raising adolescents. It's a struggle to know how much to let go and how much to hold on. When you layer in the differences of opinion involved, things can be pretty tough.

The goal of parenthood is to bring our children to the place where they are self-sufficient, mature adults contributing positively to society.

That never takes place unless we let go.

As much as we struggled with the empty nest, both Cheryl and I are thankful our boys are not only self-sufficient, mature young adults, but are, in fact, contributing to society.

We are thankful they possess a faith in Christ, a faith that will carry them forward in this life and the next. For Christian parents that's the highest goal of all.

### **Home Is a Matter of Who You Are With**

Let's turn our attention back to Ruth.

Her willingness to stay with Naomi has been the stuff of legend for centuries. Ruth would stay with Naomi come what may.

She was willing to leave her homeland behind and follow Naomi to an uncertain place. Ruth knew though that love trumps uncertainty every time.

Ruth was living proof that home is not so much a matter of where you are, but who you are with.

Cheryl and I and the boys have had to live that out any number of times as we've itinerated from church to church. John and Monica are getting ready to experience that as well.

Again, home is not a matter of where you are, but who you are with.

The fact that Ruth wanted to stay with Naomi speaks volumes to the deep need in all of us to be in relationship.

### **The Promise of Unlimited Possibilities**

Ruth's willingness to remain with Naomi held great promise, the promise of unlimited possibilities.

The two leaned on one another for support. Because they had one another, they were able to get by literally and figuratively. It's no coincidence that the Lord was able to provide for their every need in family.

Eventually, Ruth would marry Boaz, a relative of Naomi's husband. The two would give birth to Obed, who became the father of Jesse, who was the father of David, the great king of Israel.

All of this to say, the possibilities are unlimited when we stick with family.

Things would have been so much different had Ruth not stuck with Naomi. In fact, history itself would have been re-written.

When tempted to give-up on family, the story of Ruth and Naomi is good encouragement.

### **Keeping Family Important**

The message for today is that the sky is the limit when we keep family as a matter of first priority.

There is so much these days that vies for our attention. There is so much that works to pull us apart rather than bring us together.

It comes to us to keep first things first.

If you take a fishbowl and a bunch of rocks of various sizes and put the smaller ones in first there is no room for the larger ones. When you put the larger ones in first, miraculously, there's plenty of room for the smaller one.

When we take care of the more important things in life, like family, life has a way of taking care of itself.

And when life doesn't cooperate, as is so often the case, we will have the wherewithal to meet whatever it is that comes our way because we know we don't have to go it along.

The support of family is absolutely invaluable.

### **The Breakdown of the Family**

There's a lot of talk these days about the breakdown of the family. Indeed there is every reason to be concerned. The stresses and strains on family are enormous.

The time and energy needed to nurture things at home is all too easily expended on other things.

We run around with our emotional tanks on empty and wonder why the family is in peril.

There is no time like the present to deal with the tough issues facing your family. It is important to talk about those things as tough as that might be.

“If you can’t talk about things at home, then where are you going to do that?”

### **There Is Every Reason to Be Hopeful**

Let’s affirm though that there is every reason to be hopeful. I get the sense that the winds of change very well may be blowing.

People are learning that family time is some of the most important time spent.

People are learning that things are a poor substitute for love.

People are learning that faith development for parents and children alike is something not to left to others, but is something that starts at home.

All of these things and so many more give us hope for the family.

And in talking about hope, let’s be sure to affirm that the story of Ruth and Naomi is a story of hope, hope brought about and nurtured in family.

Naomi’s grief was quelled, her desolation was healed, and her poverty was met head-on. Ruth went on to live a life full of love and fulfillment. And God’s good purposes came to pass.

### **Honoring Mothers on This Special Day**

On this day in which we celebrate mom and motherhood, we realize just how important motherhood is to the fabric of our faith, not to mention society.

The story of Ruth reinforces that in a big way.

You really can’t put a price tag on motherhood, although attempts have been made.

According to a recent report from *salary.com*, a website dedicated to researching average salaries, stay at home moms would earn an average of \$131,471 annually, including overtime, if they received a paycheck.

Among the jobs mothers do, according to *salary.com*, include being a daycare worker, a van driver, a housekeeper, a cook, a chief executive officer, a nurse, and a general maintenance worker. These are all jobs you can easily fix a dollar amount to.

There are other things like a hug that comes just at the right time, the crust cut off a sandwich in that certain way, or a welcoming shoulder when one is needed to lean on.

Mothers we can’t pay you for what you do, but we can honor you. We can do so with our love, support, and certainly our prayers. So let’s do that just now.

Men, let me invite you to stand and offer your prayers. Women, thank you for giving us the opportunity to pray for you.