

Subject: God's Grace in Guiding Our Steps

Scripture: Ruth 2:1-10

Today is "Barefoot Sunday," and I want us to think not only about shoes, but about steps. Specifically I want us to think about how God guides our steps. Ruth 2 is a perfect illustration of two powerful verses:

- **Psalms 37:23** *The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.*
- **Proverbs 3:5-6** ⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.* ⁶ *In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*

A lot of people today believe in "luck." I read a story about a lost dog in the lost and found section of a certain newspaper. This is what it said: "Lost: one dog. Brown hair with several bald spots. Right leg broken due to auto accident. Rear left hip hurt. Right eye missing. Left ear bitten off in a dog fight. He answers to the name 'Lucky'." I don't believe in luck, but I do believe in God and His providence. Ruth 2 is a beautiful example of God's providence. In other words, it shows how God provides for His people in every way. He is working behind the scenes and in the shadows to oversee all the details. Ruth is a beautiful story about the goodness of God, the guidance of God, and the grace of God.

Providence has to do with the way God protects us, guides us, and supplies all of our needs. The word "providence" comes from the word "provide." God is our Provider. We don't always realize it is the hand of God until after the fact. Providence has been described as "the hand of God in the glove of history." Providence means that God is able to take care of us. Nothing is too big or too small for God to handle.

- "The vastness of the sway of Providence cannot be imagined. It ranges from the archangel to the microbe, from the highest heavens to the humblest anthill; nothing is too large for His grasp, nothing is small enough to elude His notice." – W. J. Townsend

Step 1. A famine in Bethlehem

From Ruth's standpoint, the providence of God began with a famine in Bethlehem (1:1). This was a famine she knew nothing about and could have cared less. It didn't affect her, did it? It was the famine that caused Naomi's family to move to Moab so they could find food.

Step 2. A family from Bethlehem

Ruth somehow met Naomi's family and she married one of her sons. It was through this family that Ruth first heard about Jehovah, the true and living God.

Step 3. Three funerals in Moab

Ruth suffered the loss of her father-in-law, Naomi's husband, her brother-in-law, the husband of her sister, Orpah, and her own husband. These were tragic and sad losses at the time, but she would not have come to know God without those funerals. We need to remember what Job said,

- **Job 1:21** *And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*

God gives us blessed additions and sometimes He brings blessed subtractions to our lives. Either way we are blessed.

Step 4. The godly fear and simple faith in Ruth's heart

Ruth faced the prospect of dying without God and without hope. There is little doubt that the deaths of her father-in-law, brother-in-law, and her husband caused her to think long and hard about her own death.

- **Ecclesiastes 7:2** *It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.*
- **Ephesians 2:12** *That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:* These are some of the saddest words that can ever be spoken—"having no hope, and without God in the world."

One of the lines of *Amazing Grace* says, "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved." Ruth says, "I'm sticking with you, Naomi. Where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God (Ruth 1:16)."

Step 5. The field of Boaz near Bethlehem

Chapter 2 takes place in a harvest field somewhere near Bethlehem. It may be that Joseph and Mary traveled through this same field about 1,000 years later when Jesus was born. When Ruth and Naomi returned to Bethlehem, it was the beginning of barley harvest in the spring. Ruth looked for a way to find some food for the two of them, and so she went to glean in the fields. God led her to the right field. The law of gleanings (leftovers) was important in those days.

Farmers didn't have expensive equipment, so everything was done by hand. Some of the harvest was intentionally left in the field for poor and needy people, like Ruth and Naomi.

- **Leviticus 19:9-10** *And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God.*
- **Deuteronomy 24:19-21** ¹⁹ *When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.* ²⁰ *When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.* ²¹ *When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.*

Step 6. A fellow in Elimelech's family

The name "Boaz" means "strength." He was a good man, a compassionate man, a man of integrity and character, a generous man, and a rich man. And wouldn't you know it, he was a single man, the most eligible bachelor in all the land. He was also related to Naomi's family, so according to Jewish law he had a responsibility to care for Naomi and her family. This was called the law of the kinsman-redeemer. Ruth was weak, but he was strong. Ruth was dirt

poor, but he was incredibly rich. Ruth was a nobody; Boaz was a somebody. Ruth was in need of help; Boaz was ready to help. Do you see the hand of God in all this?

Do you see how God is providing? It was *the right time* (harvest). Ruth went to *the right place* (the field that belonged to Boaz). She met *the right person* (Boaz, a mighty man of wealth). She had *the right response* to Boaz (she was humble and grateful). Then Naomi told Ruth that this is *the right relationship* (Boaz is kin to their family). Naomi knew that Boaz was the key to their survival. You don't have to know key people, if you know the keeper of the keys. And finally, Naomi gave Ruth *the right advice*, "Do whatever Boaz says."

Boaz is a picture of Christ:

1. He was a mighty man of wealth (2:1)
2. He was from Bethlehem (2:4)
3. He saw Ruth before she saw him (2:5)
4. He took care of Ruth even before she belonged to him (2:8-9, 15-16, 20)
5. He was related to Naomi and Ruth (2:1, 20)

God's providence brought Ruth to Naomi and then to Boaz. God brought her from a foreign land to a field in Bethlehem. And God has brought you here. You're not here by chance or by accident. God cares about all your needs and He is willing to meet your greatest need, the need for salvation. It's all by grace. What should you do? Do what Ruth did (2:10).