

LESSON 10: WHAT IS A REDEEMER, AND WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH ME TODAY?

GREETING

What has been the most significant purchase you have ever made for yourself? You don't need to divulge any money amounts. In fact, the most significant purchase may not have been the most expensive, but the most meaningful. Describe what you purchased and what made it such a big deal at the time.

What's the most significant purchase you've ever made for someone else?

Have you ever been the recipient of another person's generosity in a big way? If so, what was that experience like?

GROUNDING

BEHIND THE SCENES

This passage mentions an unnamed man who was the guardian-redeemer for Naomi and Ruth. Other Bible translations call him a family guardian or kinsman-redeemer. This description comes from the Hebrew word *go'el*, meaning "redeemer." A *go'el* was a male relative who was responsible for caring for a deceased relative's possessions, including land, houses, livestock, and even the widow. If the deceased had debts, the *go'el* would pay them. If the deceased was childless, the *go'el* would marry the widow and produce offspring who would carry on the name and family lineage of the deceased man. When they came of age, those children would inherit the deceased man's property. The possessions and people who were cared for by a *go'el* were said to be "redeemed."

The *go'el*'s responsibility, then, was supremely sacrificial: He invested much in supporting his deceased relative's estate and family but received little to nothing in return. Israel's social system and survival as a people depended on men who performed their duty as a *go'el*. So important was this role that Isaiah 43:14 describes God as Israel's *go'el* or redeemer, a concept that carries over to the New Testament understanding of Jesus' life and ministry.

God's Word: Ruth 4:1-12

¹ Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat down there just as the guardian-redeemer he had mentioned came along. Boaz said, "Come over here, my friend, and sit down." So he went over and sat down.

² Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here," and they did so. ³ Then he said to the guardian-redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelek.

⁴ I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line."

"I will redeem it," he said.

⁵ Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property."

⁶ At this, the guardian-redeemer said, "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it."

⁷ (Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.)

⁸ So the guardian-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." And he removed his sandal.

⁹ Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰ I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!"

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¹¹ Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, “We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem.” ¹² Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.”

What went through your mind as you read this account? What questions come to mind? What impressions of Boaz did you get?

Jot your initial thoughts and questions here.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Boaz was a well-to-do farmer who owned land and crops and had numerous employees. Why would he be interested in a poor Moabite widow such as Ruth, despite Jewish law forbidding intermarriage with Moabites? It so happens that Boaz was a fifth generation descendant of Perez, who was the son of a Canaanite widow named Tamar. Tamar’s first two husbands died. They were both sons of Judah, one of the great-grandsons of Abraham himself, the father of the Jewish people. Judah promised to give her his third son, but he neglected to fulfill that promise. So Tamar used some loopholes in the law, plus a little trickery, to get Judah to father twin sons, one of whom was named Perez. (Genesis 38 has the full details.) Thus, Tamar provided for her future security and family line. Perhaps this was why Boaz was sensitive to the plight of disadvantaged foreign widows such as Ruth. And he was brave enough to ignore social stigma to follow through on his promises to care for her.

GRAPPLING

What do you think about the guardian-redeemer system at work in this story? What modern customs or laws do we have that have similar goals?

Regarding the business deal Boaz made with Ruth's guardian-redeemer, what were the costs and benefits for Boaz? What were the costs and benefits for Ruth?

BEHIND THE SCENES

Boaz met the unnamed man who was entitled to be Ruth's guardian-redeemer at the town gate. This setting is significant, for that was where officials handled town business and where private business deals were legalized. As romantic as parts of the book of Ruth sound to us today, Boaz was there strictly on business. Women were considered in the same category as land or livestock when it came to transferring ownership or responsibility for them. They were part of a man's household with no legal rights to their own property.

Because such a legal proceeding required witnesses, Boaz made sure elders were present. His business was two-fold: 1) to transfer ownership—or redemption—of Elimelek's land; 2) to ensure that Elimelek's family name would continue through Ruth, the only childbearing female of his household. Any offspring would inherit Elimelek's property and carry on his family name. The possibility of a mixed-race child taking over the land was a complication the guardian-redeemer didn't want. The matter was settled as he gave his sandal to Boaz, a gesture that was already archaic at the time. The way was clear for Boaz to become Ruth's guardian-redeemer.

If Boaz already had land and wealth and any land he purchased from Naomi would go to Ruth's future son, why do you think he chose to become Ruth's guardian-redeemer?

Boaz and Ruth had a son, Obed, who was an ancestor of King David and, by extension, Jesus. How has Jesus functioned as a guardian-redeemer for us, like Boaz did for Ruth and Naomi?

GOING DEEPER

This is a safe place where we welcome sharing. We can respect each other even when we have differences of opinions. Our different personalities, experiences, and perspectives can enrich our conversations. Let's open our ears and hearts to listen to what God wants us to learn through others and his Word.

INTERESTING THOUGHTS SPARKED BY OTHERS
IN MY GROUP:



GROWING

BEHIND THE SCENES

The Hebrew word for *redeem* is used 22 times in Ruth and 104 times throughout the Old Testament. It means to restore, repair, or avenge. God is the ultimate redeemer (Isaiah 49:26). In the Old Testament, God redeemed people from slavery (Exodus 6:6), disobedience (Isaiah 44:22), harm (Genesis 48:16), enemies (Psalm 107:2), captivity (Isaiah 43:14), and death (Hosea 13:14). In the New Testament, God sent Jesus to provide redemption for all people: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23-24).

What are some ways we might express our gratitude for God’s redemptive actions for us?

Record those ideas here.

How might we function to guard or redeem someone in our sphere of influence?

Write those thoughts here.

What might it cost us, and are we willing to pay that cost?

Add those ideas here.