

God's Sovereign Love

Rescues

Redeems

Restores

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~Dedication~

To know God's sovereign love within the sacred oneness of marriage is a blessing like no other. It is living out the love story of Boaz and Ruth—a redemptive love that compels a life to walk within the reality of God's mercy and grace. Sherry, you are my Ruth, a blessing from God that I will forever cherish and uphold. May God's grace in Christ continue to sustain our days—for His glory. I love you.

J.T.

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God's love is administered in the context of His sovereign rule. He is in total and complete control of history and every detail of life that it contains. We must start here.

Introduction

The book of Ruth is a picture of God's larger love story played out in the lives of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. It is a narrative that beautifully depicts the nature of God's redemptive and enduring love for His bride and echoes the covenantal aspect of God's love that is woven throughout the Bible. The overall message of Ruth is a reminder that God's redemptive love, a constant interaction of His mercy and grace, is perfected within the details of our lives. In Christ, God's sovereign love will always be effective—where God wills, His love will always prevail.

"For I am sure that neither death nor life...nor height nor depth...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 8:38-39

The story of Ruth, in a very simple yet profound manner, displays the character and beauty of God's love. In some way, it is a snapshot of a much larger picture. It is but a mosaic fragment of an epic love story that is on display for all eternity, yet performed act by act within the everyday life of our relationships. In the context of our Christ-centered

marriages, it is a working and very practical love that reflects God's control and His eternal plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. It is a union of two that have forsaken themselves that they may fully experience and display the redeeming love of their Lord and Savior. While the teaching points in the book of Ruth are plentiful in number, this study will focus on three foundational aspects of God's sovereign love.

God's love is:

- 1) Sovereign
- 2) Covenantal
- 3) Redemptive

This is not to diminish the many other characteristics of God's love or teaching points found in the book of Ruth. In any attempt to study God's love, we must humbly know that our efforts to grasp the fullness of such love will fall short. Similarly, we could not stand on a beach and capture the full depth and width of the ocean before us. Yet, it is with humble hearts that we will attempt to gaze upon these attributes found within the profound beauty of God's sovereign love and by His grace be transformed by it.

God's love is administered in the context of His sovereign rule. He is in total and complete control of history and every detail of life that it contains. We must start here. God's love is "packaged" within a defined promise, or pledge, known as a covenant. Unfortunately, the culture of our day rarely refers to this rich word that reflects the enduring and legally binding commitment between two parties.

A covenant transcends circumstances to create a “regardless” and sustaining aspect within a relationship. To experience God’s love is to know the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. While the package of God’s love is contained within the covenant, it is only by trusting in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ that one can personally receive, in fullness, God’s covenantal pledge of love.

While Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz lived their lives in the historical promise of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, they no less walked by faith in the reality of His redeeming love. Ultimately, this is the culmination of God’s sovereign love—to rescue, redeem, and restore—all for His glory. God had a plan for Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz and it involved the details of their lives, a love story like no other, *and yet much like yours and mine.*

Getting started...

As we will see with greater clarity in the following pages, God’s sovereign love story is perfected in and throughout the lives of His children—especially within the realm of the sacred marriage relationship between a husband and his wife. **Before we engage this study further, I am asking you to take an hour to read through the book of Ruth (see appendix) with your spouse and answer the questions on the next page.** As you read through this study, reflect back on how God *has weaved* His sovereign love in and throughout your marriage. Please conclude your time in prayer.

4. Considering your marriage today...do you see God's sovereign love at work? If yes, give some examples.

5. In the context of your marriage, what is your favorite "God-sovereign love moment?" (A time and/or place in your marriage that God's love was actively bringing both of you closer to Him and each other)

It means that every circumstance, both good and bad, is held within the constraints of God's control. You must look past the temporal to see the eternal love fiber that God is weaving through your life. He is in charge of it all for one greater purpose—that you and your marriage may be purified for His pleasure and the glory of His name through Christ Jesus.

*A Love Story Like No Other:
His Sovereign Plan*

*“But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,
Will enter your house...”*

Psalm 5:7

Before you took your first breath, God had ordained His love for you. Even more amazing, before God laid the foundation of this world, He had established a love relationship with His people, and in Christ you are counted as His. While difficult to fully grasp, it is the reality of His sovereign love, a love story like no other.

The book of Ruth provides a poetic picture of God’s larger love story. The lives of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz in many ways were similar to yours and mine. This is a wonderful lesson of truth that this book reflects to the reader of today. The providential hand of God is at work in the details of our lives. The characters of this book quickly discover that their plans are ultimately held by their Sovereign God that rules and administers over the affairs of mankind.

“...They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of one was Orpah and the...other Ruth. They lived about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died...”

Ruth 1:3-5

To experience God's love is to know the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. While the package of God's love is contained within the covenant, it is only by trusting in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ that one can personally receive, in fullness, God's covenantal pledge of love.

One cannot consider the redemptive act of Christ without considering the sacrificial nature of His love. The cross, in the most complete sense, embodies the essence of the word sacrifice and the application of God's enduring love. It is the willingness to yield one's will and one's life for the sake of another. Jesus Christ lived the sacrificial life and we are called to follow in His footsteps.

Marriage, like everything God has made, is meant to reveal His glory. While there will never be a perfect marriage (until the bride of Christ is finally united with the Son of Man in eternity), God has given us both the means and the end toward a marriage that will reflect His sovereign love—it is His Son Jesus Christ. As our marriage becomes held within the constraints of God's sovereign rule, every aspect of who we are and how we live becomes increasingly imbedded within our redeeming relationship with Jesus Christ.

The lives of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz provide us a picture of God's sovereign love in action. As the book of Ruth demonstrates, God's love is perfected in the minute details of our lives. Within our life stories, God writes the paragraphs as well as each comma, sentence, and period.

The ultimate good before God is the glory of His Son Jesus Christ. To be conformed into the image of Christ is the culmination of God's perfecting love. It is His master plan to create a holy and blameless people for the praise of His name. **Your life and your marriage are part of this plan.**

"...who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works."

Titus 2:14

To embrace God's sovereignty within your life and your marriage is to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 2:7). It means that every circumstance, both good and bad, is held within the constraints of God's control. You must look past the temporal to see the eternal love fiber that God is weaving through your life and your marriage. He is in charge of it all for one greater purpose—that you and your marriage may be purified for His pleasure and the glory of His name through Christ Jesus.

While the principle teaching of God's sovereignty is rather simple, the application of it is a day to day battle. We are sinners that continually want our lives to be all about us...our happiness, our pleasure, our wants, our desires and the world around us only feeds our insatiable hunger for ourselves. This makes daily "renewal" of our minds essential (Romans 12:1-2). We need to be most intentional with what matters most to God.

A question I ask over and over again is this: **If you are not taking care of the most important thing in life, why are you so busy with everything else?** It is a simple matter of priorities and living our lives in the reality of God's sovereign love story. Everything, including our marriages, are here for one greater purpose—to bring glory to God through His Son Jesus Christ.

Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz each had a part to play in the ongoing story of God's epic plan of salvation. The beauty of this smaller love story is that Ruth and Boaz lived their parts within the context of God's larger love story, a story that displays God's sovereign involvement within the lives of His people.

God's 20/20 Vision:

It is vital that as we evaluate our famines and the famines of others that we continually seek to see the suffering and trials around us from God's perfect perspective—His revealed Word. This will force us to go beyond ourselves and see God's providential handiwork. We must remind ourselves that our lives and the lives around us are under His direct control...ultimately for one greater purpose: To glorify God through the reconciliation ministry of Jesus Christ.

His larger "rescue" plan is to redeem and restore. As we continue to glean from the book of Ruth, this is the over-

riding theme that will continually surface. The question for us as married couples is this: Are we living within the reality of God's sovereign love?

Please review these questions and discuss as a couple:

1. How does the Bible define sovereign? (see Psalm 33)
2. How would you describe God's sovereign love to a non-Christian? What Scripture verses could you share with them?
3. Consider the circumstances within the past few months of your lives and your marriage. Have you responded to these events in a manner that reflects God's control and His ultimate will to be glorified? (Read Romans 5:1-8 and John 9:3)
4. Identify a "famine" (difficult and/or reoccurring problem) in your marriage and/or life in general. Look at it from God's perspective...how can He be most glorified by your response?
5. Now look around you...in your church and your own neighborhood. Has God providentially placed other individuals or families in your life that are currently going through a famine of their own? How does God want you to come alongside them?

His covenant of love exemplifies the essence of relational intimacy, i.e. oneness and permanency. As defined by the Good Shepherd, to know God's love is to be secured in His hand, "...and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand" (John 10:29).

Wrapped in a Covenant

“Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.”

Ruth 1:14

God is love (1 John 4:16b) and He delivers His love faithfully in the form of covenants. In its truest sense, God’s love is commitment personified—nothing can stand in the way of the effectual power of His choice to perfect His love; it is an immovable anchor to Himself (Romans 8:31-39). At the core of God’s love is a volitional choice to covenant Himself to His people. It is a covenantal love that ultimately uplifts His pleasure and His glory.

“So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in Love abides in God, and God abides in him.”

1 John 4:16

“...In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.”

Ephesians 1:4-6

Ruth demonstrated God's covenantal love as she **clung** to Naomi amidst life's circumstances that were attempting to pull them apart. The Hebrew word for clung, *dabaq* (transliterated), is also used in the following verses:

*"...love the Lord your God and walk in all His ways and keep His commandments and **hold** fast to Him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul."*

Joshua 22:5

*"He arose and struck the Philistines until his hand was weary and **clung** to the sword, and the Lord brought about a great victory that day; and the people returned after him..."*

2 Samuel 23:10

*"For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall **cleave** to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."*

Genesis 2:24

Captured within the context of this Hebrew word is the implication of two separate objects and/or entities that are brought together with such intensity as to create, in essence, a new oneness. In a relational manner, to cling to another in this manner signifies the quintessential application of God's covenantal model of love.

of the circumstances of life, as you cling to God's covenantal calling, He will bring oneness and permanency to your marriage.

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you (Matthew 6:33).

Please read through Ephesians 5:21-33 and consider the following questions.

1. Describe the covenantal relationship between Christ and His church (body). How important is commitment within any connection, i.e. relationship? Can you really have an authentic relationship without a real commitment?
2. How does mutual submission out of reverence to Christ help set up the different roles with the marriage? (differing roles regarding submission and leadership)
3. Have you viewed your spouse as your own body, i.e. oneness of flesh?
4. Pray the words of Ephesians 5:21-33 together. Insert the words "cause me" in the place of wives and husbands as appropriate.

For example:

Cause me to submit to my husband, as to You Lord...

Cause me to love my wife as Christ loved the church...

Cause me to love my spouse as myself....

Cause me to love in a manner that sanctifies my spouse (moving them closer to you Lord)...

The importance of prayer in the marriage relationship:

Prayer is a heart dialogue with God that positions us in a place of submission and neediness. If we fail to pray, we fail to submit to God's will for our lives. If we fail to pray, we fail to need God in our lives. If we fail to pray, we fail to see God intimately shape our lives. If we fail to pray, we fail to see God work through our lives.

From the *Treasury of Andrew Murray*:

God's decrees are no iron framework against which man's liberty would vainly seek to struggle. No, God Himself is the Living Love, who in His Son as man has entered into the tenderest relation with all that is human, who through the Holy Spirit takes up all that is human into the Divine life of love, and keeps Himself free to give every human prayer its place in His government of the world.

If God has made you and your spouse "one flesh," how important is that you are *together* praying daily for God to work in and through your marriage?

In its fullest meaning, God's redemptive love is that place where God's mercy and grace come together. To know God's love is to be rescued from our bondage of sin and set free to totally serve God and one another. Our marriages are called to reflect the redeeming nature of this love.

A Redeeming Love

"...But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the LORD lives, I will redeem you..."

Ruth 3:13

For many people, the famine had ended. Yet, for Naomi and Ruth, their lives were still in a state of great need. With their husbands both dead and no apparent means to earn money their situation was looking quite bleak. In a manner of speaking, they were held as prisoners, bound to past circumstances and a present that offered little hope. They were in need of redemption.

"...Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

Ruth 1:20-21

Interwoven within the fullness of mercy and grace are the acts of repentance and forgiveness. These are the very practical, “hands and feet,” of mercy and grace. In Christ, to know His mercy and grace compels a contrite heart—one that is repentant and in need of forgiveness.

Where Mercy and Grace Come Together

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:16

Postscript: Boaz and Ruth continued to live their lives within God's sovereign love and lived happily in pursuit of God's glorious favor.

While we are not given an “ending” beyond their genealogy, based on what we do know, it is not a stretch to think that Boaz and Ruth continued to walk the path of God's sovereign love. This is the calling and hope of every marriage that God has created and sealed with His Holy Spirit: *To live a marriage that is defined by God in order that we may live for God.* Practically speaking, it is living within the reality of God's sovereign love—that place where mercy and grace come together on a daily basis to the glory of God.

As we saw in Ephesians 5:21-33, when mercy and grace come together within the marital relationship the outcome is redemptive in nature, i.e. reconciliation will take place. This is the love Christ has given us and this is the love we are to give to one another—*especially as husbands and wives.*

God gives you Christ as the foundation of your marriage. “Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Romans 15:7)...Don’t insist on your rights, don’t blame each other, don’t judge or condemn each other, don’t find fault with each other, but accept each other as you are, and forgive each other every day from the bottom of your hearts.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, 31-32 from John Piper’s *This Momentary Marriage*, Crossway Books

To capture the fullness of God’s sovereign love is, indeed, a difficult, if not, impossible task. I can more readily describe what it is by sharing what it is not. It is not like a quilt that is comprised of many little pieces that are knitted together. While it does share in character the diversity of a multi-colored quilt, this analogy falls short given the fullness of overlapping aspects contained within each specific characteristic of God’s love. Yet, if one would make a quilt by taking equal size pieces of cloth that are proportionate to the total dimension of the quilt itself and sew these one on top of another, this quilt would better display God’s sovereign love. With this quilt, the many aspects of God’s love share *in fullness* and are *inseparable* from one another.

This more complete view of God’s love is essential in attempting to apply it within our lives and our marriages. Where God’s love is perfected, mercy and grace equally abound. As Christians filled with God’s love, we are defined by our redemptive love for another. Remember, redemption is a place where mercy and grace come together to bring about reconciliation with God and others.

Mercy:

The *unmerited* goodness, loving-kindness, compassion, and faithfulness of God.

“but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Romans 5:8

Grace:

The *unmerited* favor of God.

The ultimate ideal and/or prototypical example is the perfecting love of Jesus Christ. In spite of ourselves, God withheld the punishment we deserved—mercy and brought us into His favor in Christ Jesus—grace (Romans 5:8). As such, to love as Christ has loved us (John 13:34-35, Ephesians 5:25), we must daily embrace the practical application of living out the mercy and grace God has given us.

As noted above, God’s mercy and grace share a vital oneness in principle: **They are only real when not deserved.**