

Seven Reasons to Say “I Do”

When Fairytales Come True – Part VII

Ruth 3:11-17

Introduction

In an email that someone sent to me this past week, a number of interesting facts were highlighted about our rapidly changing world. These included facts such as:

- the average person will have had twelve jobs by their thirty-eighth birthday;
- the top ten jobs that will be in demand in 2010 did not even exist in 2004; we are currently preparing students for jobs that do not yet exist, in which they will use technologies and tools that have not yet been invented, in order to solve problems we do not yet even know are problems;
- seventy percent of United States’ four year olds have used a computer;
- there are over one hundred million people registered on MySpace, which means that if MySpace were a country, it would be the eleventh largest country in the world;
- the first text message was sent in 1992 – my youngest daughter probably sent it – actually, she had not even been born yet;
- currently, the number of text messages sent and received every day exceeds the population of the world;
- there are nearly three billion searches on Google in one month’s time.

One of the points that stuck out to me in this list of rapidly changing dynamics in our culture today was that by the year 2005, one out of every eight couples who married, met online. This number has increased dramatically in the last three years.

I did a little digging and found out that the fastest growing trend in dating is e-Dating. More and more relationships are developing online.

In fact, I read one author who had done some extensive research on this subject and recorded that conservative estimates indicate there are currently fifty million people who are using online dating services.ⁱ

If you have been around here for a while, you have probably heard me take a crack or two at eHarmony. I want you to know that a dating service that tries to match people is not the “big bad wolf”. In fact, there are some wonderful couples in our church who met through some kind of online service.

This is one of those gray areas. There are no verses on how to communicate with someone in order to biblically fall in love.

Fortunately, by the time I started dating, the telephone had been around for a long while – you know, it is that black glossy plastic thing you used to hang up on the wall in the kitchen.

However, there needs to be a warning given for every single individual – not just for online dating services, but for dating period. The word that has risen to the top of the dating scene, promised by online dating services and pursued by millions of singles worldwide, is the word, “compatibility”.

One web-dating service promises to match people with numerous dimensions of compatibility, which are, “scientifically based predictors of long-term relationship success.”ⁱⁱ

These are interesting words: “scientifically based predictors of long-term relationship success.”

Part of the emerging problem with all of this is that reports are now in, estimating as high as ninety percent of online daters are lying about themselves.

One researcher wrote, “For men, the major areas of deception in an online relationship are their income, height, and marital status; for women, the major areas of deception are weight and age.”ⁱⁱⁱ

So a scientifically based predictor matching a person with someone they have never even met could actually be created by someone who is lying.

In fact, online dating services are now estimating – and I am telling this to further terrify you – that at least twelve percent of online male suitors are already married. Even more common, singles are developing online relationships with more than one person at a time.

One of our pastors on staff emailed me this week and said he is aware of singles in this church who

have been hurt by this very thing. One woman discovered the man she was falling in love with online was involved with another woman online at the same time. Another couple canceled their wedding plans after dating in real life because they realized what matched online did not gel with primary goals in real life.

Pastor Brad Harbaugh wrote to me saying, “We believe online dating sites can only give a person an introduction. We advise them to spend no less than six months seeing that individual live their life in person – where they can be observed day in and day out making decisions, choosing friends; where they can be watched in the way they treat other people and relate in the body of Christ.”

This is well put.

A key word that sums up the advantages of dating over time in real life is the word “accountability”. Accountability with friends who observe your relationship; accountability with pastors and spiritual leaders who get to know you both; accountability with peers you rub shoulders with; even accountability with parents who can offer insight and feedback is invaluable.

The truth is that whether online or on a live date, we all know what it means to put our best foot forward, right?

On my first date with Marsha, to a church service, no less – and I have had her in church ever since – I showed up at her dormitory wearing my best suit. This suit was navy blue with thick, mafia-like pinstripes; I had on a dark blue shirt with a solid white necktie made with 100% polyester; oh, I had on baby blue saddle oxford shoes. When she opened the door to meet me, she nearly fainted – she did not know if I was there to pick her up or shoot her! Much later, she told me what she thought about our first date, saying, “I wanted to *be* with you, I just didn’t want to be *seen* with you.”

We do not go out on a date and tell the other person all our problems; we do not lay out our idiosyncrasies at first, right? We wait until later.

Dating in real life provides time for later. Online dating can speed up the process because a person has been given the reassurance that they have been matched. In other words, you have found someone just like you – as if marrying someone just like you would be a good thing!

So let us be honest. We are all fallen. Romance in real life is between two sinners.^{iv}

Now, do not get me wrong. Similar tastes, desires, and interests are wonderful things. But the differences, distinctives, tastes, and perspectives in our God-created spouses are intended to compliment, broaden, develop, and deepen who we are, how we think, and ultimately, how we live.

The biblical view of marriage is not as much compatibility as it is complimenting, which means that there are differences to iron out, perspectives to sharpen, and thought processes to balance.

Two sinners, seeking God’s grace and His will for their lives, covenant to love each other for better or for worse. This happens to be the greatest illustration of the love of Christ for the church on Earth (Ephesians 5:32).

Think about this. We happen to be the bride of Christ. How compatible are we to Him? Not very.

This reminds me – do not forget that two people can share a lot of similar tastes and interests, but if they do not share a relationship with Jesus Christ, they are not truly compatible where it matters.

The search for Mr. Right or Miss Right is not a search for someone *like you*; it is a search for someone who wants to be *like Christ*.

So, conversion to Christ is the starting point, right? It is extremely dangerous to consider dating someone as an opportunity to evangelize them.

Some of you may have married an unbeliever and you knew it when you started dating him or her – and they came to faith after you were married, praise God. You are not the rule – you are the exception.

Our churches are filled with spiritual widows – married, but spiritually unrelated to their unbelieving husbands.

Begin with salvation.

If the internet dating service you have chosen does not include your relationship and commitment to Jesus Christ, how can they find a match for you? A verse to consider in this context is,

***. . . what fellowship has light with darkness?
(II Corinthians 6:14)***

“What fellowship” can be translated as “compatibility”. So, “What compatibility has light with darkness?”

All the compatibilities can be put over to the side – you both love the same kind of music, food, vacation spots, number of children, sense of humor, personality, career, background, geography, accent, and ice cream. Put all of these in a pile, but if there is

no spiritual life by virtue of faith in Christ, none of these other items matter.

The bottom line is conversion – then character.

How do we detect character? Over time, with prayer, asking the Lord for discernment and guidance we can detect and discern true character.

Seven Reasons to Say, “I Do!”

If Boaz and Ruth had a checklist, I wonder what it would have looked like.

By the way, *no one* would have ever matched them! Boaz and Ruth were terribly incompatible as far as the world goes. They had different family backgrounds with different family traditions; they were geographically worlds apart; one had grown up a follower of God, the other had grown up in idolatry and pagan religion; one was rich, the other was poor; one was a business owner, the other a migrant worker; one was single, the other had been married; one had not experienced the death of a spouse, the other had; one was a mature believer, the other was a new believer; one was financially independent, the other lived hand to mouth – the list could go on and on.

However, Boaz and Ruth had this in common – a commitment to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to His word.

From their brief love story, and especially their encounter at the threshing floor where Ruth proposed marriage to her kinsman redeemer, we can make several observations about genuine character. These observations should be a checklist for every single individual and the goal for every married individual to pursue. These are not as much for us to be, as for us to become.

I have uncovered seven character qualities in Ruth chapter 3 – seven reasons to say, “I do.”

1. Spirituality.

The relationship of Boaz with God was living and active. In the days of the judges when everyone did that which was right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6 & 21:25), Boaz lived with the sense of spiritual awareness.

When we first met Boaz, in Ruth chapter 2, he asked for God’s blessing on his employees. When he first met Ruth, he prayed that God would shelter her under His wings.

Now, at the threshing floor, after the love of his life asks him to become her kinsman redeemer – to marry her, buy her late husband’s estate, and pay all

her family’s debts – the first thing Boaz says, in verse 10 of chapter 3, is,

. . . *“May you be blessed of the Lord, my daughter. . . .”*

In other words, “God bless you, Ruth.”

This was not an act; this was not a put on, this was reality. Boaz had a vital, active, living, walking, breathing relationship with God. This is foundational.

This is where we begin.

Unless the Lord builds the house, [we] labor in vain to build it . . . (Psalm 127:1)

This is the reason that when I marry a couple, I ask each of them before the vows are exchanged, “Can you say in the presence of these witnesses that you have accepted Jesus Christ into your life as Lord and Savior?”

For those who are single, it really will not take very long to discover whether or not they are sincerely walking with Christ. Ask questions like:

- Do they talk about Him?
- Do they want to please Him?
- Do they live for Him?
- Do they encourage you to follow Him too?
- Have you ever seen their Bible?

I not only observe in Boaz the character quality of spirituality, but another quality as well.

2. Humility.

These two attributes of spirituality and humility do not necessarily show up in the same body.

Look at Ruth 3:10b as Boaz says,

“. . . You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich.”

This is a long way of saying, “I can’t believe you chose me.”

When Boaz refers to Ruth’s first kindness, he is probably referring to her care for her mother-in-law Naomi. He then refers to her last kindness as better than her first.^v

Boaz is saying, “You are so kind to want to marry me.”

Now we are told nothing about Boaz’s age, although his reference to her as his daughter indicates he was much older. This can, however, be an expression of kindness and care.

Further, the Bible does not tell us anything about his looks or his physique.^{vi}

We do not know if Boaz was tall, dark, and handsome or tall, skinny, and bald, which is *so* much better – let us be honest!

We do know he was wealthy enough to hire employees and own fertile fields. And Ruth is a destitute woman from another country, one step from being a beggar, with nothing tangible to offer but debt and potential scorn. Boaz still says, “I am so thrilled you want me.”

Boaz’s humility is obvious.

We have watched him care for his employees, care for Ruth, communicate concern for those around him, roll up his sleeves to work at the threshing floor, and even sleep there to help guard the grain.

The truth is that in his culture, Boaz was near the top of the food chain. He had more reasons to be proud than humble, yet nearly every time he opens his mouth, the quality of humility comes out.

Let us look at another character quality to add to the checklist.

3. Priority.

In other words, Boaz knows what matters most. So does Ruth, evidently.

Boaz goes on to say, in verse 11b, “The reason I’m so pleased with your proposal and I want to say, “Yes,” is because all my people in the city know that you are a woman of beauty . . . you are a woman of rare talent . . . you are a woman of class . . . you are a woman of personal charm . . .

“. . . you are a woman of excellence.”

Your translation may read, “. . . you are a woman of noble character.”

This same word is translated as “virtuous” in Proverbs 31. It is the exact same word that is used to refer to Boaz in Ruth chapter 2.

We hear a lot of sermons about the virtuous woman. It is too bad we do not hear sermons on the virtuous man.

“Hayil” is the Hebrew word that means “a person of moral strength”.

This is the making of a good match. Both Boaz and Ruth were committed to the priority of godly living.

They were incompatible in every way except character. This became the footing upon which Boaz and Ruth could build their home and the haven that it would become throughout their generation.

A fourth marker in this godly match is the next word on the list.

4. Honesty.

This is when Boaz drops an atomic bomb which explodes the mood and the moment. Look at verse 12.

“Now, it is true I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I.”

This is the law of the “goel” or the kinsman redeemer.

What anguish there is in these words. I can imagine Ruth beginning to cry. Did she know? Had Naomi told her? Did Naomi withhold this little piece of information knowing that Ruth might not have gone had she known it? Did Ruth already know and go to the threshing floor anyway to inform Boaz that she really wanted him to redeem her according to the Old Testament provision of kinsman redemption?

We do not know the answers to these questions. What we do know, however, is that after Boaz told her that he effectively loved her and would be thrilled to marry her, he told her the truth, even though it might ruin everything. “Listen Ruth, I would love to redeem you as your closest relative, but I’m not your closest relative – there’s someone older than I and thus first in line, who has the right to redeem you!”

In today’s culture, Boaz would have gotten a lawyer to sue the other guy for his rights. He would have put a restraining order on the other guy.

He would have found a counselor or psychologist to tell him to follow his heart and do whatever made him happy. In fact, he would have been told that loving Ruth was wonderful and God created love and would certainly want him to be happy, so not to worry about the law.

Boaz would have found a pastor to tell him the laws of kinsman redeemer were for a different context and culture and did not apply to him. And besides, the laws of kinsman redeemer were centuries old and certainly no longer relevant.

He would have found some friends to tell him, “Look, Boaz, you’re not getting any younger and you love her and she loves you and these are the days of the judges when everyone does what is right in their own eyes, so if it’s right for you, then man, it’s all right. Get over your Victorian guilt and go for it.”

Does any of this sound familiar?

Instead, Boaz simply says, “Ruth, I can’t because it’s not right according to God’s word, so I’ve got to

be honest and tell you that there's someone closer in line."

Spirituality, humility, priority, and honesty are character qualities for the list. Now let us look at a fifth reason to say, "I do."

5. Accountability.

As I read and reread this text, I found it hard to imagine any man in Boaz's sandals saying the next few words. Notice verse 13.

"Remain this night, and when morning comes, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the Lord lives. . . ."

Did I just read this?!

". . . if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. . . ."

Is he kidding?!

Is Boaz some kind of concrete block with a heart made out of granite; with no feelings or emotions?

"Hey, if he wants you, well that's fine with me!"

Not on your life – we have already read his first response.

Boaz just happens to be a man of character – to the point that he submits his emotions to the law of God.

This matter must be settled legally.^{vii}

Ancient Jewish commentary on this scene, called the *Midrash*, taught that this other kinsman was Naomi's brother-in-law – an uncle to Boaz.^{viii}

So at this point, his mind is obviously racing, as we will see him prove the next morning, but Boaz still holds himself in check, accountable to the word of God.

Single friends, if you find someone who is willing to set aside their emotions and their personal feelings in order to do what is right, then you are well on your way to finding a man or woman worthy of saying, "I do!"

Does the individual set aside their emotion in order to do what is right?

This is like the little seven-year-old girl who obviously had her emotions under control, much like Boaz here. An eight-year-old boy in her Sunday school class at church asked her to marry him. She said, "I can't." He protested, "Why not?" She said, "My daddy married my mommy, my grandpa married my grandma, and all my uncles married my

aunts, so we can't get married, 'cause we're not related."^{ix}

We have got to do what is right!

However, there is something that is easy to overlook. Family relation or not, there is nothing binding upon Boaz or Ruth to surrender to the law of kinsman redeemer. They could have married and the other man could have been told that Ruth was picked by another man. It would have been no big deal – he did not want her anyway.

It mattered, however. In fact, since Ruth more than likely knew about the other relative, she was also willing to abide by whatever the law of God allowed – nothing less and nothing more.

Let me break this down as simply as I can. Boaz would rather remain single and lose the love of his life than disobey the word of God! For him, it was not Ruth or someone else, it was Ruth or no one else, unless the Lord directed otherwise.

Boaz had already thought this through, but instead of coming up with loopholes to the covenant of God, he was strategizing on how to approach the other redeemer who was closer in line to Ruth.

Let me put this in practical terms: if the individual in which you are interested does not honor the word of God, you have no assurance they will live an honorable life.

There is another word that comes to mind in this list of character qualities.

6. Purity.

Notice verse 13b, when Boaz says,

". . . Lie down until morning."

Lie where? Continue to verse 14a.

So she lay at his feet until morning . . .

We have already dealt with this issue in our last discussion, but make no mistake in this – Boaz might have taken advantage of her. Ruth had already expressed her love to him and he to her – what more is needed?

There was no advantage taken. There was no solicitation given. There was purity!

Let me give a practical word to every single woman:

- **If a man demands your body before he declares his vows, his name is not worth taking.**

In simple terms, throw him back in the lake and keep fishing.

Let me be just as practical with single men:

- **If a woman uses her body to manipulate your heart, you have little reason to trust her heart.**

What we have in Bethlehem this night are two sinners, who happen to be highly committed to God. And here are two people who have quietly pledged their love and chose to wait in purity to see what God would do.

Let us look at the final character trait I observe in Boaz.

7. Generosity.

In verse 15, Boaz fills Ruth's cloak with barley and tells her to take it home. Verse 17 gives his specific command, retold by Ruth to Naomi,

“. . . Do not go to your mother-in-law empty-handed.”

He had every reason to keep his money and his grain, but Boaz was sensitive to the needs of Ruth and Naomi. This amount of grain would hold them for at least two weeks.

No doubt he is thinking that within two weeks, the matter will be resolved and these women will be cared for permanently.

If the individual you are interested in is stingy and selfish, do not expect generosity to follow the wedding ceremony. So watch how they use money. Do they hoard what they have? Do they spend money only on themselves? I am not talking about careful stewardship, I am talking about being stingy – they are just cheap. That is an ancient Hebrew word.

Boaz is showing genuine care and rare generosity. James the apostle calls it pure religion, to care for widows in their need (James 1:27).

Conclusion

So there is a character quality checklist from the romance of Boaz and Ruth that includes:

- spirituality;
- humility;
- priority;
- honesty;
- accountability;
- purity;
- generosity.

These are observations from a life marked by character.

No matter how you met that guy or that gal – online or in real life – if you begin with conversion, and move to character, then, no matter how many compatibilities you have or do not have, with the word of God serving as the rudder for your heart in the sea of emotion, you will sail a God-honoring journey – sometimes the water will be rough, sometimes it will be smooth.

According to His will, which you are pursuing as your priority, you just might dock at an altar where you will commit your marriage to glorify the Savior, advance the gospel, illustrate Christ's love for His church, create a haven in the midst of a dying world, and raise a generation to live for and love Jesus Christ who, still to this day, is calling a bride to Himself as her Kinsman Redeemer.

ⁱ Rick Holland, quoted in Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong (Harvest House, 2009), p. 30.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., quoting www.eHarmony.com, p. 33.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 33.

^{iv} Ibid., p. 34.

^v A. Boyd Luter and Barry C. David, God Behind the Seen (Baker, 1995), p. 62.

^{vi} David Nettleton, Provision and Providence (Regular Baptist Press, 1975), p. 26.

^{vii} M. R. De Haan, Ruth: The Romance of Redemption (Zondervan, 1962), p. 116.

^{viii} Robert L. Hubbard, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Ruth (Eerdmans, 1988), p. 217.

^{ix} Michael Hodgin, 1001 More Humorous Illustrations (Zondervan, 1998), p. 271.