



Risk Everything for God and His People - Ruth

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Introduction:

We continue our spiritual adventure this morning talking about what it takes to thrive spiritually. Those who thrive spiritually risk everything for God and his people.

Not everyone who sits in this audience this morning would consider themselves a risk taker. However when it comes to thriving spiritually, we have to risk everything for God and his people.

I wish to begin this morning by reading you a letter. Listen as I read.

Dear Abby,

I need your advice. My life reads like a story out of the Bible. My sister and I grew up on the other side of the tracks. There was a lot we didn't have, compared to those we viewed as "chosen." But we had a good life. Both my sister and I dropped out of high school and went to work for a rancher. His name was Eli Melech. He and his family had moved from out of state to take over a pretty impressive wheat operation. Wouldn't you know, the rancher and his wife had two sons about the same ages as my sister and me.

Well, you can probably guess what happened. Sis and I fell madly in love with these boys, and we married Lon and Leon. It was wonderful. Our lives were full, and we all worked in the family business. A big party was planned to celebrate the tenth anniversary of my in-laws' moving to town, when the unexpected happened. My father-in-law dropped dead of a heart attack. And a few months later, just as Lon and Leon began to gain some competence in taking over, they were both tragically killed in an accident out in the field. Needless to say, we lost the business.

That's why I'm writing you. My mother-in-law feels she had no option but to move back to where she originally came from. I am helping her pack. I love her so much. Unlike those mother-in-law jokes you hear about, she has been like a real mother to me. Knowing that Sis and I are from these parts and have extended family here, she told us not to feel any responsibility toward her. She basically said we were free to go back and live with our family. Sis is more emotionally attached to our mom and dad than I am. She's already moved home. But, Abby, I don't know what to do. I love my parents, too. But I don't want to leave Leon's mother alone. She is still grieving terribly. I think she needs me. She's a deeply religious woman. I can tell by the way she prays that she knows who she's talking to. She even has me reading the Bible and talking to God. That's something my parents weren't into. I didn't know much about God before I got married to Leon. But once I started spending extended time with his mom . . . it's amazing. I really feel like I am alive spiritually.

I'm in a real quandary, Abby. I have never lived anywhere but here. I've never traveled more than twenty miles from town. I'd love to pack up and go with my mother-in-law, but going with her would mean a whole lot of unknowns. My parents are not in the best of health. I would dearly miss Sis. And what would I do to help support Leon's mom? I have no skills other than working in the fields. On the other side of the coin, I have this funny feel-

ing inside that God has something special in mind for my life. When Leon was killed, I thought my life was over. But it's not. I really think pulling up stakes and taking off may be the best thing for me. Oh, Abby, what should I do? Stay or go?

Signed,

Bewildered Daughter-in-law

Actually this is not a letter to dear Abby, but a modern rendition of the story of Ruth.

We don't know a great deal about Ruth. We do know that she had some strikes against her. In a male-dominated society, she was the wrong gender. In a race of people who prided themselves on being able to trace their roots to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, she was an outsider. Worse than simply being brought up on the wrong side of the tracks, she was one of the Moabites, who were despised by the Jews.

We do know from reading the story that she was a young woman who was motivated to give up what was comfortable and subject herself to the inconveniences, insecurity, and indescribable challenges. Ruth came to the realization that Naomi's God was not just another god – the god of the Jews – but was indeed the only true God and the Lord of her life.

Maybe you relate to Ruth. You feel excluded. You feel demoralized. You feel like life can't get much worse than this. Whatever can go wrong has gone wrong.

Ruth surrendered her family ties and homeland to follow God and his people. She took the risk of being misunderstood and rejected for God. Her mother-in-law was ready to send her back to her people. Ruth said – I will take a risk and stay here with you.

Ruth 1:16

But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God."

Ruth took her hands off the controls of her future and took a leap of faith. The Lord repaid her for the risk of faith she took. Listen to the words of Boaz.

Ruth 2:12

"May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

I'm convinced that if we want to thrive in our faith, we need to ask ourselves a couple questions each day.

The first is this: "Lord, my life belongs to you. How do you want me to spend this day's currency?"

The second question is this.... "Lord, how can I get my eyes off myself and serve others?"

As we sense the Lord speaking to us and we see the obvious opportunity that demands a response, we act.

There are times in our walk that we make decisions based on what we want, and what we think, and what looks good to us as far as the future is concerned. God has a plan and purpose for you and me but if I don't seek to do His will and desires, I will not thrive spiritually. We can get so selfish at times, and if we are going to thrive, we have to realize that its about Him and others.

Ruth surrendered her family ties and homeland to follow God and his people. She ran the risk of being rejected and misunderstood. All who desire to thrive spiritually reach a point where they are called to risk something for Christ. Because this kind of commitment is ongoing, you are invited to consider the following possible areas of risk this week. What might you do in a situation similar to one of these? What might the Lord be asking you to risk?

Your car or home - A young, single mom needs a reliable car so she can keep her job and support her child. You have an extra car you rarely use. A family in your church needs a temporary place to live after a serious flood. They have no idea how long it will take until they can move back.

Your reputation - You are greatly bothered by the amount of pornography available to young people in

your community. You fear that if you speak up you will be branded by some as a narrow-minded conservative who opposes free speech. You socialize with some people who share a common hobby. You want to express your Christian faith, but you're afraid of being viewed as different and less a part of the group.

Your income - You've received a modest inheritance from a loved one. A good friend has been trying to raise support for missionary work for two years and desperately wants to get started. She promises to pay you back as additional support comes in. You sense God is leading you to start a website ministry, but you'd have to quit your job to make it work. You have some savings to get you started, but there's no guarantee you can make the site self-supporting.

Your family - Your teenager wants to spend a year ministering in a nation known for terrorism and a dislike for your country. The need for Christ is prevalent, and the mission considers the situation safe enough.

Your future - You will retire soon and plan to travel. You hear a sermon that challenges you to give some of those years to overseas missions, using your career skills. You're trying to discern God's will for your vocation. He has gifted you with an ability you really enjoy using, but it probably won't provide as much income as other job options.

Did any of these scenarios strike a chord with you? Some situations may occur spontaneously, while others require forethought and planning. This week, ask God the following question and listen for his response:

"God, is there an area of my life where you might be calling me to 'run the risk?'"

Here are some things to consider when taking a risk for God.

To risk takes commitment – The commitment is to let go of what is secure, what is known. It is making a decision and acting on that decision, following through to the end what commitment I have made.

Conclusion:

God has spoken to you today. You know in your heart that there is something that you consider a risk, but you know God is calling on you to do it. You are struggling, either with the courage, the commitment, or the confidence to act on what God has spoken to you. You are afraid of taking that risk. Fear is what is keeping you from thriving

Those who have ever jumped out of a plane know there is a moment when you make the commitment to jump. You risk your life and trust the parachute and jump.

To risk takes courage – It is easier to stay in the boat so to speak. It is easier to stay with the familiar. It's easier to stay with the things I am comfortable with. To many, those comfortable places and individuals represent security. At times I may be required to face that fear or anxiety in a courageous way.

To risk takes confidence – I must be confident in following God's will. I must be confident that God has not directed me to fail. It may be that God has directed me to do something that is beyond my comfort, beyond my desire, beyond my puny foresight. In doing God's will I find peace, fulfillment, clarity and direction.

To risk includes a cost – The cost of the commitment may include money, time, relationships, or things. It may even mean our life.

I am reminded of that famous quote by Jim Elliot...."**He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.**"

Was God there for Ruth? He certainly was. And the end of her story is so fulfilling. It is so encouraging. Ruth married Boaz and gave birth to a son. Her son was named Obed. He was the father of Jesse, who was the father of David. If you look in the Book of Matthew, the first chapter, you see there are three women named in the lineage of Christ. One is Rahab, another is Ruth and the last is Mary. If Ruth had not been willing to stay with her mother-in-law in a strange land, and risk everything that was comfortable to her, she never would have been in the lineage of Christ.

**IS GOD THERE FOR YOU? – YOU BET HE IS.
WILL YOU THRIVE? – YOU BET YOU WILL.
Survival mode is not where God has designed us to be. Let's THRIVE**

and acting on what you know God has put in your heart to do. Will you face that fear with courage, and confidence, having counted the cost, and make the commitment this morning to risk it all for God.

By raising your hand this morning you would say – that’s me pastor Dave. I want God to strengthen me to do what He’s put in my heart to do. I want to thrive and in the end, I know doing God’s will is the best thing.