**Theme:** Faith in God means acting strategically to pursue God’s will.

**Aim then:** The faithful Hebrew applies God’s law, in appropriate ways.

**Call now:** To act out of faith in God, considering what that looks like each day.

Hopefully you remember where we are in the story of Ruth, and what has happened so far. The book opened by telling us that we are in the time of the judges in Israel – that is a time characterised by a disregard of God’s law and morals, except for a few faithful individuals. There’s a famine in Israel, and so Naomi, along with her husband and sons, leave Israel to go to a foreign land. In this foreign land Naomi’s husband and sons all pass away, so Naomi is left in the depths of winter, with only her daughters-in-law for comfort. Yet even in this awful situation, Naomi shows immense faith. She has lost everything, is living in a foreign land, has with no access to God through the tabernacle; and yet she does not question God’s plan. Her response is to say “The Lord’s hand has turned against me” – but she does not question God’s sovereignty, his goodness, his existence (after all she is in a land where people believe in other gods). No – she accepts how God has dealt with her.

It’s in this condition that Naomi returns to Israel, along with Ruth – her daughter in law – and we meet Boaz, a rich landowner. Naomi identifies Boaz as their guardian redeemer, the one who, according the God’s law, must buy their land and hold it for them until they are able to buy it back from him. He is to support them in their financial struggles. Spring has come in the story – Naomi has remained faithful through the depths of winter, and things are looking up.

And so we reach the events of Ruth 3. A couple of weeks seem to have passed, and Naomi realises that the harvest has come to an end (we see they’re starting the winnowing process of the barley that has been gathered). The metaphorical winter in the story may have passed, but the literal winter is approaching, there is tension, and Naomi sees potential hardship if nothing is done about their situation.

But we’ve seen that that Naomi has great faith, and she knows that God’s revealed word, the law, is right. Boaz is their guardian redeemer, according to God’s law he is responsible to support widows like Naomi and Ruth through their hard times; and so she acts on the law. Naomi prepares Ruth, and sends her to lie at Boaz feet. Boaz wakes, and is overjoyed to see Ruth there; Boaz is convicted by their faith, and commits to fulfilling the law – and not just fulfilling the law, but fulfilling the law in the proper way by first consulting the closest redeemer, and if not redeeming them himself. Naomi is left satisfied that her faith was well placed – they will be redeemed.

And so we see that faith in God means *acting* to pursue God’s plan. For God’s people in the time of the judges this meant returning to God’s law, and acting on it to hold each other accountable – for the good of the society. The faithful Hebrew acts on God’s law. And for us this means faithfully living out God’s call on our lives – God has a will for us, as we are conformed to his likeness, and we must be acting to pursue God’s will in our lives. ***[long pause]***

Faithfully acting on God’s will is the primary message I wanted to draw from Ruth chapter 3, and I would have been confident leaving the gobbet there, but I have the time, and I have skipped over a lot of detail in the text – Naomi tells Ruth to wash, put on perfume, and to put on her best clothes. She tells her to wait until Boaz has finished eating and drinking, to uncover his feet, and to lie down there. We’re told that afterwards Ruth leaves before anyone could see her, and Boaz sends her off with a bag of barley. What’s the point of all this? Surely Naomi could have gone to Boaz (or even to the guardian redeemer who is even closer to them) and told him what God’s law says, told him that he needs to be obedient to God, told him to live faithfully to God.

But would that have worked? Of course not – Boaz is a human, and in direct confrontation he would choose to rebel against God, just as we all do. What’s more there were cultural limitations stopping Naomi meeting Boaz, and to do with the proper way of doing things. No, Naomi carefully considers what the best way is to approach Boaz, what the best way is to act on God’s law.

And it is effective, we’re told that when Boaz goes to sleep he was in good spirits (they were right to wait for the right time), and when he wakes, Ruth clearly looks very youthful and beautiful, since he comments how she could pursue younger men that him. Yes, *acting* on God’s word is the priority, but there is a right way and a wrong we to do it.

In the big idea, the theme, I included the word ‘strategic’. First, we are to act to pursue God’s plan. But second we are to act strategically when acting on God’s plan. For Naomi and Ruth, for the Jews in the time of the judges, this meant applying God’s law appropriately to the people and culture they were in. For us, this means carefully considering how we live our lives in accordance to God’s will.

For us this has a particular application in outreach – first presenting the gospel from a desire to be faithful to God, but in that presentation making every effort to present the gospel in a way appropriate to the individuals we are engaging with while keeping to the truth of the gospel. But more than just outreach, this means that each day we should consider how we are going to live our lives for Christ today, and what that will look like in the particular situations we encounter.

So let’s be active in faithfully living out God’s call on our lives, but let’s be strategic, practically thinking what that looks like each day.

**Q:** Is it appropriate to say about the characters “they behaved this way, therefore we should also behave in this way”? They are sinful humans (especially when they essentially use sex appeal (make Ruth attractive) to convince Boaz to redeem Ruth), and of course it’s by no means a universal principle that we behave like the characters in the bible?