

Handfuls On Purpose

Studies in the Book of Ruth

Chapter Fourteen

Gleaning in the Field of God's Love

“¹³ Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly {i.e., to the heart} unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens. ¹⁴ And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched *corn*, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left. ¹⁵ And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach {i.e., shame} her not: ¹⁶ And let fall also *some* of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave *them*, that she may glean *them*, and rebuke her not” (Ruth 2:13-16).

Love is one of God's many attributes (qualities or characteristics). It is know as a *communicable attribute*, meaning it is one He wants to transfer to the lives of His children. It is one of the most difficult practices to learn, because it is the opposite of what we are. Mankind by nature (fallen) is almost totally preoccupied with himself (self-love). Bible love (God-kind love) preoccupies itself with meeting the needs of others.

Another problem with understanding love is that man has redefined its meaning to be an emotion. To most people love is something they *feel*. For others, love is something they *fall into* or *fall out of*. For a large group of people, love is synonymous with sex.

It is obvious why God speaks so often about love in His Word giving many examples of it rather than trying to define it. The reason for this is because apart from the examples of love in the Bible, it is really totally beyond us. Love is a supernatural expression of Who God is and restoring its reality in the lives of believers is a major aspect of restoring the image of God in our lives.

Boaz loved Ruth, but his love had little to do with his emotions or feelings. It was not *love at first sight* or something he *fell into*. Boaz loved Ruth because Boaz was a loving, caring, gentle man. Love is not defined by what we feel. Love is defined by what we are and the actions of our life because of what we are. Love always does the right things (the best things) for the ones that are loved. To do anything else is to manifest an ignorance and inability to love. To rightly love is to reveal both the knowledge of God and His supernatural working in our lives.

“⁸ He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. ⁹ In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. ¹⁰ Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. ¹² No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. ¹³ Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit” (I John 4:8-13).

God's love (the kind of love God is) is not defined by what He feels, but by what He is? He does what He does (actions of love) because of what He is. Feelings and actions flow from the well of what we are on the inside. Love (the kind of love God is) can only be produced by God. He is its only source

“²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. ²⁴ And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:22-24).

How is what we *are* made visible? How is love seen? (Ruth 2:13)

Love is made visible by what we do for others. Boaz shows great love for Ruth in this text. His actions reveal his love. Love always describes an action that benefits another person. It never describes an emotion or feeling. There may be feelings and emotions that accompany love and that are often confused as love, but those emotions or feelings are not love.

When Ruth says, "Let me find favour in thy sight" (2:13) she is making a statement of hope. It might be paraphrased, "May I continue to find favour, based upon your past performance or actions." Ruth is not making a request of Boaz. It was a way a Hebrew woman implied gratitude for what had been done for her. Ruth was expressing sincere gratitude for what Boaz had already done for her. We have a similar reply from Hannah to Eli after he had blessed her in I Samuel 1:18.

"And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more *sad*" (I Samuel 1:18).

In Ruth's next statement, she acknowledges that Boaz loves her. The words, "Thou has comforted me" (not just made me feel good) designate something done that meets a specific need of someone oppressed or distressed. In other words, Boaz had sacrificed of himself to meet the needs of another.

Real love meets needs. Isn't that the definition of ministry?

Biblical ministry cannot be defined apart from Biblical love. To determine if we love someone, we might ask ourselves the question, "What am I doing to help the person I say I love to become a better person?" Or, "What need have I met in that person's life that has helped him/her become a better person or realize his/her potential in Jesus Christ? The reality of a person's love for another person is measured by two things:

1. What you are doing to help another person.
2. What you sacrifice to accomplish it.

If you do not love, you will not minister to others. If you do not minister to others, you do not love. You may force yourself to do ministry out of obligation or because of perceived pressure from Christian peers, but this kind of ministry becomes self-serving and is not done out of Biblical love. When we know the kind of sacrificial, others-serving kind of love that God is, we seek to replicate that kind of love in our own lives.

"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (I John 4:8).

When it comes to ministry, most people want to be involved in the *big things*, but few are willing to do the little things that go unnoticed. If what we do is to earn personal praise or glory, it is not an act of love. It is an act of selfishness. Someone has said, "It is amazing what we can accomplish if we do not care who gets credit for it."

³¹ When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: ³² And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: ³³ And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ³⁵ For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: ³⁶ Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. ³⁷ Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed *thee*? or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink? ³⁸ When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*? ³⁹ Or when

saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? ⁴⁰ And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me. ⁴¹ Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: ⁴² For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: ⁴³ I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. ⁴⁴ Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? ⁴⁵ Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me. ⁴⁶ And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matthew 25:31-46).

This text does not refer to the Social Gospel. The text refers Christ dividing true believers (“sheep”) from false believers (“goats”) by what people do towards the nation of Israel during the seven year Tribulation and before the second coming of Christ at Armageddon (verse 31). How does Christ divide the real disciples (“sheep”) from false disciples (“goats”)? He divides them by their actions of love towards persecuted Israel. Just like in the case of Boaz, real needs were met.

Is this text teaching socialism? Is the faithful Christian responsible to feed the starving masses in the world? Is the faithful Christian responsible to provide housing and clothing for the homeless? No, that interpretation takes this portion of Scripture completely out of its dispensational context and applies it to present sociological issues. The text does not mean the believer is responsible for every drug addict, drunkard, or shiftless bum who refuses to work. The Bible says if a man (Christian) refuses to work, he shouldn’t eat of the common (communion) meal (II Thessalonians 3:10).

Secondly, a believer is not responsible for those who reject the gospel and who reject Jesus Christ and the authority of His Word over their lives. They are receiving the natural consequences of a chosen life of sin (Romans 1:24-32 and II Thessalonians 3:6-13). On the other hand, when someone is really trying to live for the Lord and has some real needs, the believer should try and do what he can.

The first and greatest need of any person is the need to be saved. That need is met in God’s love and provided as a free gift of God’s grace through faith in the finished sacrifice of Christ in the payment of our death sentence on the Cross of Calvary. That is the love that needs to be given to the whole “world.”

The second greatest need of all people is the need to be loved. That need is met in hundreds of ways by hundreds of different people as they work together to help one another restore the image of God in each other’s lives.

“For thou has spoken friendly” (Ruth 2:13) reveals another important aspect of Biblical love.

This statement could be literally phrased, “For thou has spoken to the heart.” Boaz’s love went way beyond meeting the physical and material needs of Ruth. He sought to meet her spiritual needs (the needs of her heart) as well. Biblical love sees beyond the physical and material needs, although it does not ignore those needs.

“¹⁴ What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be *ye* warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what *doth it* profit? ¹⁷ Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. ¹⁸ Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works” (James 2:14-18).

The central problem behind the misinterpretation of this text is the false teaching of the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man. God created one man named Adam. All other human beings are the product of procreation, not creation. He fathered one Son, named Jesus. To become a child of God a person must be “born again” by grace through faith in the “finished” propitiatory work of Christ and His resurrection out from the dead. That new birth is what makes us brothers and sisters “in Christ.” It is to those individuals that James 2:15 refers.

If you feed a hungry person, he will be hungry again tomorrow. Real love forces the believer to go beyond the obvious and external to deal with the inner man and the spiritual failures which brings the lost person to his human predicament. The only correction for ignorance is education. The only correction for moral turpitude is confession and repentance and that person’s acknowledgment of his need of salvation and being “born again.”

“Come thou hither” (Ruth 2:14).

These words from Boaz instruct Ruth to draw near to him. Here is the big difference between the “love of this world” and the love of God. The love of this world is preoccupied with things. The love of Christ is preoccupied with people. Real love (ministry) is pouring what God has given you of Himself into another person’s life.

²⁵ But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. ²⁶ But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; ²⁷ And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: ²⁸ Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25-28).

“Among the sheaves” (Ruth 2:15) and “Even pull out some handfuls on purpose for her” (Ruth 2:16).

Two things about love are revealed here.

1. Real love is not concerned about recognition or applause. It is willing to be secret.
2. Real love is concerned about human dignity and self worth (this differs greatly from the humanistic idea of self-esteem).

If we love with the expectation of gratitude or with the idea that the person loved is indebted to us, that is not a gift of love, but a down-payment on a person’s soul (to make them indebted). Biblical love does not indebt people to you. Real love frees people from indebtedness. Real love is always of grace or it is not love. Anything less takes the divine attribute of God’s love and prostitutes it.

When the believer serves God, it should be because he loves Him. The love of God is magnified at Calvary where He gave His only begotten Son to meet every single need of man for salvation. The love of God is also magnified in the giving of the Holy Spirit to indwell the believer and to enable him to become what God expects him to be.

The love of God is magnified in the giving of His Word to mankind to provide all we need to teach us how to live righteously. In summary, God’s love is magnified by His giving. He did not need us. We need Him, so He gave of Himself to meet our desperate needs. We glorify God (make Him and His love known) by the exhibition of the kind of love God is; by loving others the way He loved us.

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1. Discuss why Biblical love is such a difficult thing to learn to do. _____

2. Discuss why *falling in love*, *falling out of love* or defining love as an *emotion* or *feeling* is totally out of harmony with Biblical love. _____

3. Discuss why Boaz loved Ruth and why God loves you. Discuss how understanding this helps the believer define Biblical love and practice it. _____

4. Read 1 John 4:8-13. Discuss the meaning of verse 8 especially dealing with the idea that feelings and actions flow from the well of what we are on the inside. _____

5. Read Galatians 5:22-24. Discuss the only true source of Biblical love and how that love is released through the life of the believer. _____

6. Read Ruth 2:13. Discuss how love is made visible. _____

7. Compare the statement of Ruth (2:13), "Let me find favour in thy sight" with the statement of Hannah to Eli in I Samuel 1:18 and Ziba to King David in II Samuel 16:4. Discuss what these statements are intended to reflect about those making them. _____

8. What does Ruth's statement "Thou hast comforted me" (Ruth 2:13) reveal to us about Biblical love? What is the meaning of these words? _____

9. Give the two things by which the reality of a person's love for another person is measured.
A. _____
B. _____

10. Discuss why most people want to be involved in the *big things* of ministry. _____

11. Read Matthew 25:31-46. Discuss how Christ divides His real disciples (“sheep”) from false disciples (“goats”). _____

12. Discuss the first and greatest need of any person and how that need is met. _____

13. Discuss the second greatest need of all people and how that need is met. _____

14. Discuss the words “For thou hast spoken friendly” in Ruth 2:13, what this reveals about Boaz’s love for Ruth and how that truth should be applied through the lives of all believers. _____

15. Discuss the spiritual significance of the words “Come thou hither” in Ruth 2:14 regarding Biblical love. _____

16. Discuss the spiritual significance of the words “Among the sheaves” in Ruth 2:15 and “Even pull out some handfuls on purpose for her” in Ruth 2:16 and the two things regarding Biblical love that are revealed by these two statements. _____

17. Discuss the fallacy of doing good deeds with the expectation of being repaid or having someone to be indebted to you for what you have done. _____
