

# Handfuls On Purpose

## Studies in the Book of Ruth

### Chapter Fifteen

## Understanding the Seasons of the Soul

“<sup>17</sup> So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned: and it was about an ephah of barley. <sup>18</sup> And she took *it* up, and went into the city: and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed. <sup>19</sup> And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man’s name with whom I wrought to day *is* Boaz. <sup>20</sup> And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed *be* he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man *is* near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen. <sup>21</sup> And Ruth the Moabite said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest. <sup>22</sup> And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter in law, *It is* good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field. <sup>23</sup> So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother in law” (Ruth 2:17-23).

Ruth 2:23 gives us a great deal of information, but in order to utilize that information we must understand some technical things about the Biblical culture of Israel and their religious calendar. The Jewish seasonal calendar was known as the Gezer Calendar. According to that calendar the harvest season started in the fourth month (Nisib) with the Passover.

Part of the Passover celebration (a week long period) was the offering of the “first fruits” of the barley harvest. The harvest season lasted exactly seven weeks (49 days) beginning on a Sabbath and ending on a Sabbath (what we call Saturday). The fiftieth day (the first day after the harvest season) was known as the Day of Pentecost and was always a Sunday.

The death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit all fell within this period of time called the Harvest Season. Jesus was the “firstfruits” of the resurrection. All those saved from the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1) to the rapture (I Thessalonians 4:16-17) will be the main harvest of souls (called “fruit” in the Bible). The gleaning and completion of the third phase of the “first resurrection” will be the saved martyrs of the Tribulation (Revelation 20:4-6).

“<sup>20</sup> But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept. <sup>21</sup> For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming” (I Corinthians 15:20-23).

What we want to focus on in this text is the fact that God has eschatological *Seasons of the Soul*. This is God’s dispensational cycle of the harvest of souls. We might call these dispensations windows of spiritual opportunity. The whole Church Age is a window of opportunity. The harvest season of Ruth 2:23 is typical of the whole Church Age and Ruth is typical of all believers who trust in Christ from the day of Pentecost to the completion of the Tribulation.

There are also individual *Seasons of the Soul* in the life of every believer. This is the working of God in the lives of individuals as He works to bring them to spiritual maturity and full productivity. This is intended to produce a continuum from one generation of believers to succeeding generations. Believers are to work with God in their own spiritual growth and then in the harvesting of souls of others belonging to their lifespan.

**God never ceases in His work to bring individual Christians to salvation, spiritual maturity and full productivity in their lives. Read John 5:9-17.**

“<sup>9</sup> And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath. <sup>10</sup> The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry *thy* bed. <sup>11</sup> He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. <sup>12</sup> Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk? <sup>13</sup> And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in *that* place. <sup>14</sup> Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. <sup>15</sup> The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. <sup>16</sup> And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day. <sup>17</sup> But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. <sup>18</sup> Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:9-18).

Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Therefore, the apostate religious leaders of Israel sought to have Jesus killed because they claimed He broke the Sabbath (an offense worthy of death). To answer their accusation against Him, Jesus makes a remarkable statement making Himself equal with God (v 17). Paraphrasing what Jesus said, “From the end of creation until now, the Father has never ceased His working and neither have I.” Jesus is the Creator. By Him everything in this world exists and consists.

“<sup>15</sup> Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: <sup>16</sup> For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Colossians 1:15-17).

The word “consist” is from the Greek word *sunistao* (soon-is-tah'-o) meaning to put things together or unite parts into a whole. The idea is that Jesus is not only the Creator, but that without Him everything would fall apart. Just stop for a moment and ask yourself where your life would be apart from God’s continual intervention and working to keep you from sin and self destruction. Jesus is always (constantly) working in each of our lives to lift us out of the slime pits of sin and advance us to higher spiritual ground.

All that happened in Ruth’s (and Naomi’s) life up to this point were seasons of her soul preparing her for a higher purpose in life. In order for her (and us) to realize God’s higher purpose (His “handfuls on purpose”), Ruth had to cooperate with God’s working in her life. She had to grow spiritually. In order for God to accomplish His purposes in our lives and in order for us to realize our fullest productivity for the cause of Christ, we each must work with God to search out and remove all barriers of sin.

“<sup>1</sup> I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. <sup>2</sup> Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. <sup>3</sup> Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. <sup>4</sup> Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me {severed from me} ye can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned. <sup>7</sup> If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. <sup>8</sup> Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (John 15:1-8).

There must be “purging” of anything in our life that keeps us from being what God wants us to be. There can be no sin, no attitude or no idol of the heart allowed to remain as a barrier to our full development as Christians. Becoming the kind of person God can use will not happen by accident. The harvest of God’s blessings (“fruit”) will only take place when the *seasons of our soul* have come to the place of full spiritual maturity in Christ.

In the early development of Ruth's life (when she was still gleaning, 2:17) she brought home a "ephah" of barley grain (about a 5 gallon pail full). God had showered her with blessings, but she had to learn to pick them up. She had to work hard to glean that much, but her bounty was only viewed from the perspective of her poverty.

As the wife of Boaz, the whole of the harvest would be hers. It is in our relationship with Christ that we finally realize our full potential as Christians. God is constantly working to bring us into that spiritual relationship with Christ (the Bible word for that relationship is "fellowship") where we learn to love Him more than life itself. That is when we will begin to realize our full potential in Christ and bring forth a harvest.

**In order for God to bless a believer's life to the fullest potential, that believer must be where God wants him to be (in "fellowship," I John 1:3-7 ) and he must be doing what God wants him to be doing ("the work of the ministry," Ephesians 4:12).**

Many Christians just cannot ever get it together spiritually. They think being in "fellowship" with God is when they are not living in sin, have their sin confessed and their lives right. That is only half of what "fellowship" with God is. "Fellowship" refers to a partnership with God. The other half is involving one's self in the "work of the ministry." The Christian has to be where God wants him to be spiritually, doing what God wants him to do.

I often wonder how much of God's ripe harvest in the season's of the soul lie rotting in the harvest field because those He intended to harvest the fruit are still in bed, or out playing, or watching a T.V. show or busy with some hobby. We pray for God's blessings and because of our idleness those blessings lie wasting away.

**We each are an important part of a broad scope of God's plan of the harvest of souls.**

<sup>12</sup> Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. <sup>13</sup> For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure. <sup>14</sup> Do all things without murmurings and disputings: <sup>15</sup> That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; <sup>16</sup> Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain" (Philippians 2:12-16).

Each believer is a part of a larger whole (the body principle of I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12). What we are and where we are in our spiritual growth as Christians will determine to a great deal our effectiveness to accomplish the overall plan of God in the locality in which we live. Take one little drive wheel out of the greatest time piece in the world and it will not accomplish what it was intended to. Take a piano with one key out of tune and it will throw off the harmony of a whole piece of music.

God is constantly working (2:13) in our lives to bring us into full harmony with His Word and His will. What Paul says in Ephesians 5:16 must become the priority of our lives if we are ever going to realize the full potential of the seasons of the soul and the harvest of God's fruit.

<sup>1</sup> Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. <sup>3</sup> But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; <sup>4</sup> Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. <sup>5</sup> For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. <sup>6</sup> Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience {unbelief}. <sup>7</sup> Be not ye therefore partakers with them. <sup>8</sup> For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light: <sup>9</sup> (For the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) <sup>10</sup> Proving

what is acceptable unto the Lord. <sup>11</sup> And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*. <sup>12</sup> For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. <sup>13</sup> But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. <sup>14</sup> Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. <sup>15</sup> See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, <sup>16</sup> Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord *is*" (Ephesians 5:1-17).

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## Understanding the Seasons of the Soul

1. The Jewish seasonal calendar was known as the Gezer Calendar. What celebration was going on at the beginning of barley harvest? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How long did the harvest season last? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What was the day after harvest season called and what day did it always fall on? \_\_\_\_\_  
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4. What is the New Testament significance in the correlation of all of this? \_\_\_\_\_  
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5. What are some of the *seasons of the soul* in your own life, where God has moved you from one place of growth to a *higher plane* or *higher walk* with Him? What was necessary (what were the circumstances) that God used to bring you to that place? \_\_\_\_\_  
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6. Read John 5:9-17. Has God ever ceased His working in your life to bring you to the place where He can use you for the things He intends? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Could Ruth have harvested the blessings of God in this *season of her soul* if she had not been where God wanted her, doing what God wanted her to do? \_\_\_\_\_
8. How does this principle apply to you? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Read John 15:1-8. Do you think that you have some barriers to growth that must be removed to realize God's blessings in your *seasons of the soul*? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Read Ruth 2:17. Did that "ephah" of barley just fall into Ruth's lap or did she have to work hard to gather God's blessings for her? \_\_\_\_\_
11. How many of God's blessings for your life are rotting on the ground, never gathered, never used? \_\_\_\_  
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12. Read Philippians 2:12-16. Are you a *missing gear* in God's plan? \_\_\_\_\_
13. What decision do you need to make today and everyday so that this will never happen again? \_\_\_\_\_  
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