

SERIES: BOOK OF RUTH
“A Good Reputation”
Ruth 2:2-23

Proverbs 22:1 says: *A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold.* In our youth we build a good name; in our middle years we develop our good name; in later years we savor our good name. All along the way, we benefit from a good name. A contemporary way to think of “a good name” is “reputation”. *A good reputation is a valuable thing.* In every stage of our lives we have to nurture, take care of, and protect our good name/reputation because a good name is very fragile. One mistake, at whatever stage of life, can demolish a good name. If that happens, sometimes you have time enough to rebuild a good name, but it is very difficult and time consuming. *A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, favor is better than silver and gold.* The proverb indicates that favor flows to our good name. The “favors” we receive in life are more valuable than silver and gold.

Favor is defined as **grace**, kindness, kindheartedness, compassion, and good will, i.e., acts of kindness displaying one’s pleasure with an object, which benefit the object of pleasure (Pr 3:34 Though He scoffs at the scoffers, Yet He gives grace to the afflicted.)¹ We call them “party favors” because they are small gifts that show pleasure in or with the recipient. In life the gifts are shared work projects, trips taken together, hours sitting with someone in the ER, etc. Think of the things friends and family do for each other that would cost a fortune if you had to pay for them. To find favor with someone is a very good thing. I think the familiar story of the exchange between a young boy and his mother helps us understand the concept of “favor”.

A mother found under her place one morning at breakfast a bill made out by her small son, Bradley, aged eight—Mother owes Bradley: for running errands, 25 cents; for being good, 10 cents; for taking music lessons, 15 cents; for extras, 5 cents. Total, 55 cents.

Mother smiled but made no comment. At lunch Bradley found the bill under his plate with 55 cents and another piece of paper neatly folded like the first. Opening it he read—Bradley owes Mother: for nursing him through scarlet fever, nothing; for being good to him, nothing; for clothes, shoes and playthings, nothing; for his playroom, nothing; for his meals, nothing. Total: nothing.² Favor really is better than silver and gold.

When you follow this concept of *favor* through Scripture you find a lot of different things. Here are just a few: To *find favor* is ...

A Promise: Proverbs 12:2 (NASB95) A good man will obtain favor from the LORD,....

Psalm 147:11 (NASB95) The LORD favors those who fear Him, Those who wait for His lovingkindness.

Ezra 8:22 (NASB95) For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, “The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him.”

¹Swanson, James: *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*. electronic ed. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, S. HGK2834

²Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979 3198 Mother Charges Nothing

A Prayer: Psalm 90:17 (NASB95) Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; And confirm for us the work of our hands; Yes, confirm the work of our hands.

A Pursuit: Psalm 119:58 (NASB95) I sought Your favor with all *my* heart; . . .

A Prize: 1 Peter 2:19-20 (NASB95) For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.²⁰ For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.

A Product [of a well-lived life]. A handful of people in the Scriptures were said to have found favor with God and man. The list includes Samuel [1 Sam. 2:26], and Jesus [Lk 2:5], and the wise who follow Solomon's advice: "My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; ² For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you. ³ Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man". [Proverbs 3:1-4 (NASB95)] I add Esther and Mordecai, Ruth and Boaz to this list.

Proverbs 3:4 *So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man*" and Proverbs 22:1: *A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold* tie a good reputation and finding favor together. Indeed, they do go hand-in-hand.

So, how do we develop a good reputation that "finds favor" in the eyes of both God and people? Turn with me to Ruth, chapter 2 and let's discover how many times the word *favor* is used in this chapter. READ CHAPTER 2. How many times was *favor* used? [3].

The Scriptures exhort us to desire a good reputation more than wealth. Ruth asked a great question in v. 10 "Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" Good question! It is one we should ask of our lives every now and then.

There was a local company that hired a young man to make deliveries to its customers. About once a month, after he had made a delivery, he would stop and call the office, try to disguise his voice, and ask "do you need a delivery boy?" Each time the answer was the same, "no, we have a good one." One day one of his friends asked him, "why do you call your boss and ask if he needs a delivery boy when you already have the job?" "Oh," he said, "I'm just checking up on myself." If you "checked up" on your reputation, would it be "good" or would it need some improvement, or repair, or changing?

This is like Ruth. Verse 2 tells us she went looking for someone to show her favor, and when she finds it, she "checks up on herself" with her question in v. 10. The answer to her question shows us how to develop a good reputation that finds favor with God and humans. In chapter two I find 10 things that she did that developed her good reputation that brought her manifold favor and blessing. If we learn from her, we too can develop a good reputation that finds favor with God and people.

TO DEVELOP A GOOD REPUTATION . . .

1. **Recognize a need and meet it**, v. 2. The "need" in these ladies lives was food. That's pretty basic. But they could not do anything about that need. They did not have a farm or a field. They had to find someone who could meet that need. So Ruth went looking. She wasn't too proud to look for help. She didn't "name it and claim it" and sit at home waiting for the LORD to deliver wheelbarrow loads of grain on her doorstep. She had a need, knew someone could help with that need, and went looking to see what she could find.

2. To develop a good reputation... **Responsibly take action and initiative**, v. 2. She took the initiative to “go” and the responsibility to “glean”. To glean means “to gather grain or other produce left by reapers, or to gather information or material bit by bit”.³ Gleaning is the law *for* the poor, and the law *of* the poor. The law *for* the poor is expressed in Leviticus 19:9-10: ‘**Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest.**¹⁰ ‘**Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God.**”

Deuteronomy 24:19 (NASB95) adds: “**When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.**”

The law *of* the poor is expressed with the word “go”. The poor had the responsibility to go to the field and do the work of retrieving the goods. When I was young, my mom taught me this law. She has always been very frugal. One day she announced “tomorrow morning we need to leave at 6. Be ready”. We were going gleaning. We arrived at the field, along with a number of other people. The farmer had harvested his fields of potatoes and onions. We were the clean-up crew. When we were finished gleaning we had 700 pounds of onions and 1000 pounds of potatoes. We ate them all winter long. My father was also a gleaner. Because he had many vending machines in packing sheds, he was always bringing home gleanings of all kinds. We had a full table because of this law *of* the poor, to go.

Ruth went. And she found favor, so much so that Boaz ordered his reapers, “**Also you shall purposely pull out for her *some grain* from the bundles and leave *it* that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.**” [v. 16] Pastor James Smith drew from this verse the subject for his series of volumes entitled “Handfuls of Purpose”.....

Dr. J. Vernon McGee gives us the application of this law *of* the poor to our christian life. He writes: We sometimes sing rather lustily, “We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves,” and then we go out and do nothing. Two things are essential if we are to come bringing “precious seed.” One is prayer, and the other is to go, ourselves, into the fields and glean. Christ gave these as the essential requirements. “Then saith he [Jesus] unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Mt. 9:37,38).

In the first place, the disciples were to pray...but that did not terminate their task. A bit later He commanded them to “go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt. 10:6). After his crucifixion and resurrection, he enlarged the commission to include the world. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk, 16:15). ...The Christian who is not out in the harvest field somewhere somehow is failing in the very first essential of Christian living. A living faith is a going faith; a vital faith is an evangelizing faith. Calvin’s comment is apropos: “Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone.” Every Christian ought to be in the field of the One who is greater than Boaz. If he goes into the field to glean, he will find that some “handfuls of purpose” have been left by Christ, which will enable him to do more than glean. He will reap a bountiful harvest in white fields.”⁴

³Merriam-Webster, Inc: *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Eleventh ed. Springfield, Mass. : Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003

⁴ J. Vernon McGee, *Ruth the Romance of Redemption*. Pasadena: Thru The Bible Books, n.d. pp. 70,71-72.

3. To develop a good reputation... **Respond to the guidance of the LORD**, v. 3 “**by chance she chanced upon...**” This specific event has the fingerprints of Providence all over it. There are many providential fingerprints in this story and the story of Esther and many other biblical accounts. The guiding, guarding, and goodness of God are all part of the providence of God. Charles Simeon, from the 1800’s, writes: It is said in the history, that “Ruth’s *hap* was to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz.” Thus, as far as it was *her act*, it was casual and undesigned; but as a link in God’s chain, it was entirely ordered of the Lord. The same must be observed in reference to every other part of the history: the minutest event in it, as in that of Joseph, was under the immediate control of God, who made use of the most contingent means to accomplish his own eternal purpose. Let not any then, however reduced, conclude that their case is desperate, or that God has brought them into such a state *for evil*: for, as the bondage and imprisonment of Joseph were steps to his highest exaltation, so may our heaviest afflictions be the appointed means of bringing us to the most exalted good. “God’s ways are in the great deep, and his footsteps are not known:” and he not unfrequently “makes the depths of the sea a way for his ransomed to pass over^h.”⁵

Pastor Warren Wiersbe has a great line. He said, **When we commit our lives to the Lord, what happens to us happens by way of appointment and not by accident.**⁶

4. To develop a good reputation... **Remember to practice manners and customs**, v. 7. Today we would say be courteous and follow proper protocol. She asked for permission before she began to glean. She was gracious and found grace in return, see v. 8-9. Parents, teach and practice manners and proper etiquette in the home. Children, learn and practice proper greetings of adults, the miracle words *please* and *thank you*, proper speech and word usage, and all other good manners. Manners and politeness pay good dividends in building a reputation.

5. To develop a good reputation... **Receive favor with gratefulness and graciousness**, v. 10,13. She starts off asking “why?” she was finding favor with him. He had to think of a reason, so he gave v. 11, when he had already fallen in love with her, v. 5. I think it was love at first sight! He would have done anything for her, but he responded by masking his feelings by rehearsing her faithful service. [That is *eisogesis* because I’m reading *into the text*] She received the compliments with graciousness, v. 13. She had done all these things as a matter of course, others had noticed, and now her actions were rehearsed as the reason for her finding favor in his sight. She could enjoy a sense of satisfaction without enlarging her ego. She appreciated the comments and notoriety but did not let it “go to her head”. She remained humble and grateful for the benefits shown her. Her reputation was now reaping favors. She stayed grateful and gracious.

6. To develop a good reputation... **Routinely do the right things**. Another way to say this is practice sowing favor and it will return to you, v. 11. “**all that you have done for...** is Boaz’ statement of her reputation. We do reap what we sow. Notice he speaks in the past tense. It is all you **have done**. It is not the future tense, “all you will do” nor even present tense, “all you are doing today”, but what she had routinely done when no one was paying much attention that was reported. It was the duty of the daily grind through the years that had built her reputation. It was the difficult decisions of deciding what was right that structured her status. Her daily routine of doing what was right over many years had followed her all the way to her new

^h Isai. 51:10.

⁵ Simeon, Charles: *Horae Homileticae Vol. 3: Judges to 2 Kings*. London, 1832-63, S. 106

⁶ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *Be Committed*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1993 (An Old Testament Study. Ruth and Esther), S. Ru 2:4

country. Her reputation preceded her and prepared this man's heart to respond favorably when he met her. Sometimes first impressions are made before you appear. Don't damage the good ones when you arrive. You may not always immediately reap favor, but eventually you will.

7. To develop a good reputation... **Rest in the LORD**, v. 12. Her faith was showing. "...**the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge**". Boaz recognized that by coming with Naomi Ruth had placed her faith in the God of Israel. She had placed herself under His name, His love, and His care. At the time of her gleaning she was trusting *this* God for sustenance and protection. To express this notion Boaz introduces one of the most beautiful pictures of divine care in all of Scripture. He imagines Yahweh as a mother bird who offers her wings... for the protection of her defenseless young.⁶⁰ In perceiving God as a bird Boaz draws on an image that was common throughout the ancient Near East.⁶¹ He speaks of Ruth's experience as "coming to seek refuge/asylum under his wings."^{62, 7} Jesus used this same expression when He wept over Jerusalem: "**Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.**" Matthew 23:37

This phrase has given birth to one of the long-lasting hymns of the Church. "Under His Wings" first appeared in Ira Sankey's *Sacred Songs No. 1*, published in 1896. It has continued to be a favorite hymn of comfort among God's people.

Under His wings I am safely abiding; tho the night deepens and tempests are wild, still I can trust Him; I know He will keep me; He has redeemed me, and I am His child.

Under His wings, what a refuge in sorrow! How the heart yearningly turns to His rest! Often when earth has no balm for my healing, there I find comfort and there I am blest.

Under His wings, O what precious enjoyment! There will I hide till life's trials are o'er; sheltered, protected, no evil can harm me; resting in Jesus I'm safe evermore.

Refrain: Under His wings, under His wings, who from His love can sever? Under His wings my soul shall abide, safely abide forever.⁸

8. To develop a good reputation... **Render faithful service**, 15, et.al. Tend to the task. Ruth was diligent in her duty. She was judicious about her job. She was busy with her business. **Not only had Boaz made it possible for her to glean this great amount, but Ruth had been diligent in the task...** This is a virtue that commends itself to every Christian and receives the full sanction of Scripture. "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" [Romans 12:11; Mt. 9:37,38.] Ruth was a woman of faith, but she was likewise found faithful in every task.... Although Boaz extended to her extraordinary privileges, she did not fail to avail herself of them and to apply herself to the task all that day. She never would have filled her bushel basket if she had not labored. The sheaves may be filled with grain; but it requires work to fill a bushel container....⁹ Students, the books may be filled with good information, but it takes diligence to get it into your head; so study to show yourself a good workman who does not need to be

⁶⁰ Cf. Deut 32:11; Isa 31:5; Matt 23:37.

⁶¹ Cf. O. Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, trans. T. Hallett (New York: Seabury, 1978), 190-92, etc.

⁶² The use of נָחַץ for "to take refuge, seek asylum" is common in the OT, but in all but three instances (Judg 9:15; Isa 30:2; Prov 14:22) the verb is used of finding protection with God. For references see *HALOT*, 337.

⁷ Block, Daniel Isaac: *Judges, Ruth*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1999 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 6), S. 663

⁸ Osbeck, Kenneth W.: *Amazing Grace : 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions*. Grand Rapids, Mich. : Kregel Publications, 1990, S. 216

⁹ McGee, p. 71

ashamed. [2 Tim. 2:15] Doing as well as you can in school is your opportunity to render faithful service. Completely doing your chores or assignments at home is another way to render faithful service and develop a good reputation. Doing our job to the best of our ability builds our reputation.

9. To develop a good reputation... **Resolve to not quit until the task is done** v. 7, 15, 17, 23. The text tells us she arrived in the morning, worked until noon, and then continued until evening of that day. Verse 23 indicates she returned every day until all the harvesting was finished. She stayed at the task even after she was tired. She persevered. After she found favor she didn't quit, slow-down, or get lazy. She stayed at the task all day and all season. She kept going. Here are the synonyms for perseverance: **persist, be steadfast, continue; keep chipping away, never say die, never say never, carry on, stick to it, hang in there, keep plugging, tough it out, stay the course, be tenacious, and hammer away.** In one word, **endure.**¹⁰ Having a good work ethic and working until the job is done builds a good reputation very quickly.

10. To develop a good reputation... **Readily utilize the opportunities**, vs. 18-23. When Ruth returned home at the end of the day, she related all the day's events to Naomi and she even brought in dinner. Let me make clear the statement of v. 18 "**She also took out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied**". This almost makes her sound selfish and has generated a lot of words in the commentaries. To make sense of this statement relate it to the same one at the end of v. 14. The setting for v. 14 is lunchtime. Ruth ate and was satisfied. But she had some lunch leftover. She put it aside and took it home with her at the end of the day. Verse 18 is now evening when she shows Naomi the results of the day's labor. Then she shares her leftover lunch with Naomi as their supper. As they were talking they agreed with the plan for Ruth to stay with the maids of Boaz. She was to stay the course and utilize every opportunity she was given. In our situation this is called volunteerism. When a new opportunity arises, take it. Go beyond your comfort zone. Expand your horizon. Cease the moment. Go for it. Grow. Taking on new levels of responsibility or being willing to do new things builds a good reputation that reaps great rewards.

By the end of the harvest season it was obvious Boaz and Ruth were in love. I imagine the whole town of Bethlehem must have smiled as they watched the town's most respected bachelor become enamored with the town's most beautiful newcomer, whom they too had taken into their hearts. The beauty of this situation would touch the hardest heart with profound wonder at the love of a great man for a noble woman of good reputation.

How do we develop a good reputation that "finds favor" in the eyes of both God and people? By desiring to have a good reputation, living intentionally, and doing the things that will develop it. Ruth has shown us how. Now it is up to us to develop our own reputations.

But why is it important to have a good reputation? There are several reasons, but here is the main one: so that when someone says something bad about you, no one will believe him. Peter put it this way "**Keep your behavior [reputation] excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds [reputation], as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.**" (1 Peter 2:12, NASB95) Amen.

¹⁰ Marc McCutcheon, *Roget's SUPER Thesaurus*.